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SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS

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THE

SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS.

APRIL.

SIMPLICITY AND PRUDENCE.

"Be ye prudent as serpents and simple as doves."—MATT. x. 16.

FIRST DAY.

"The light of thy body is thy eye: if thy eye be single thy whole body will be lightsome; but, if it be evil, thy body also will be darksome." [a]—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"Simplicity is nothing else than an act of pure and simple charity, which has only one end, namely, that of pleasing God; and our soul is simple when we have no other intention in what we do."

"The well-known history of Martha and Mary, who exercised hospitality towards our Lord, is very remarkable on this head. Although the object of Martha was praiseworthy, in wishing to treat our Lord well, she was, nevertheless, reproved by the Divine Master, because, beyond the very good end she had in view, in her haste, she mixed up other purposes with it; and thus she doubled that first end, for which reason she was reproved: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things; but one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.' [b] Christian simplicity is, then, an act of simple charity, which makes us have no other view in all our actions than the sole desire of pleasing God: this is the part of Mary, and the one thing necessary. It is a virtue which is inseparable from charity, which looks straight to God, and which cannot suffer any interference from the consideration of creatures: God alone finds place in it."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

SUCH were the first Christians, who, deeply penetrated with the spirit of their high vocation, had

(a) Luke xi. 34. (b) Luke x. 41, 42.

constantly no other object in view than to please God and to advance in His love. The evangelist St. Luke thus speaks of them:—"They that believed were together, and had all things common. Their possessions and goods they sold, and divided them to all, according as every one had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart."(a) The apostle St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, "that the faithful of Macedonia, in much experience of tribulation, had abundance of joy, and their very deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their simplicity."(b) And speaking of himself, the vessel of election, says, "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God . . . . we have conversed in this world, and more abundantly towards you."(c) This spirit of holy simplicity was most conspicuous in St. Francis of Sales, who could not suffer in his heart the very slightest affection which did not tend to the love of God. On one occasion he said: "Certainly if I knew that there was a single thread of affection in my heart which was not of God or for God, I would instantly tear it out; for I would rather not exist than not be, without the smallest exception, entirely His."

We read that God permitted to this saint, when young and studying in Paris, to be violently assailed by the dismal thought that he was doomed for reprobation. By the working of

(a) Acts ii. 44, 46. (b) 2 Cor. viii. 2.
(c) 2 Cor. i. 12.

diabolical delusion, his fears became so great as to cloud his understanding and his imagination, so that looking upon his damnation as inevitable, he fell into a deep state of melancholy. It is impossible to describe the intense grief of the virtuous youth, for as he prized and desired the love of God above all things, his soul was torn with bitter anguish at the thought of being for ever deprived of that infinite treasure. He lost his peace of mind, his sleep, his appetite, his healthy complexion, and was rapidly wasting away, consumed with sadness: he found no alleviation in prayers, or in the tears which he shed abundantly. One day, however, moved by a sentiment of the purest love, he poured forth his soul before God, as follows: "Thou knowest, O Lord, how true it is that thou art alone the sole object of my love and esteem; if it then be decreed, alas, that I am a reprobate, and that after my death I must be eternally separated from Thee, never to love Thee again, grant at least that I may love Thee during my present life; keep me not at a distance from Thee while I remain here on earth, that now at least I may love Thee as much as I am able." Such a simple and humble prayer could not fail to be highly acceptable to God. He soon rewarded it by dispelling from the mind of Francis the clouds that surrounded him, and restored to his troubled and afflicted heart the joy of the Holy Ghost, and that heavenly peace which surpasseth all understanding. When Francis became a bishop, an immense number of persons continually resorted to him for advice, comfort, and assistance, and aware of the trouble which they must give to one so occupied as he was, many would ask pardon

for their importunity; but he, with the sweetest composure, answered them all: "I beg you will not be anxious about me; I am not my own, but have sold and dedicated myself to the service of my Lord; I have resolved to spend my life for Him in whatever way He may direct, so that whether detained by this or that business, by you or others, from my private employments, all are equally welcome, for my time is spent according to the will of God. Have confidence, therefore, and never think that you are troublesome to me, for I like nothing better than to be employed in the service of my Master."

When St. Perpetua, for her steadfastness in the faith of Christ, was thrown into a horrid dungeon, her fortitude had to endure the most cruel and painful trials, especially in what regards the affections. She had an infant at the breast—a sweet comfort to a youthful mother—and they cruelly tore it away from her. "Let them take thee, my child," the noble heroine said; "I loved thee only for Christ's sake. He now wills that thou shouldst be torn from me, and this is my will also. He will supply thee with food if I trust in Him and keep my faith." Then came her father, with a new and more dangerous assault; he endeavoured to prevail with her by showing his grey hairs, and the arms in which he had so often carried her, and entreated her not to occasion his death by her own; and not content with this, throwing himself at her feet, he affectionately embraced her, and kissing her hands, conjured her, in the most endearing terms, to yield and have pity on him. The heart of the saint was touched with filial piety and tenderness; but not to the forsaking of the love of

Christ, for Whom she loved her parent, and seeing that to please Him she must pay no regard to her earthly father's wishes, she repelled his solicitations, and rising above nature and herself, still declared her inviolable fidelity to Christ, and went forth to meet a glorious death.

SECOND DAY.

"Better is the poor man walking in his simplicity than the rich in his crooked ways." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Simplicity leads us directly to God, without being stopped by self-interest or human respect; it makes us speak and act without dissimulation or artifice; and it not only embraces within itself truth and purity of intention, but it is a guardian also against all duplicity. It governs our speech, making us utter what we feel inwardly. It directs our actions, making us work purely for God in all business, whether temporal or spiritual; and exercises piety without the least taint of hypocrisy or artifice, or of vain pretensions; and, provided only His Divine Majesty be glorified, it cares not what men say or think."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

This virtue, so beautifully delineated by the saint just quoted, was possessed by him in an eminent degree. Once a young man of good family wrote to him, saying, that he had the honour of being his relation, and on that ground sought his patronage. The saint assured him of his good will, but at the same time endeavoured to persuade him, that, as he was the son of a poor husbandman, he had no claim to be of so good a family as he. On a Portuguese noble-

(a) Prov. xxviii. 6.

man writing to him, with expressions full of esteem and respect, Vincent, much afflicted at it, did whatever lay in his power to make him change his opinion, and as usual, forgot neither his original poverty nor his parentage. On one occasion, the bishop of St. Pons happened to mention to him a chateau that belonged to his own family. "I know it," replied the holy priest, "for I took care of cattle in my youth there, and I often led them in that direction." This ready trait of simplicity and humility struck the prelate so much, that he often repeated it afterwards, and never did so without great emotion.

In the government of his congregation the servant of God proceeded with so much simplicity, that without evincing the least anxiety to see its members increase, he was ever fully confident that Divine Providence would furnish him with such subjects as would suit his object, and be capable of fulfilling the duties of their holy vocation. His grand maxim was, that it belonged to God alone to choose his ministers, and that a vocation brought about by human contrivance dishonours the flock in multiplying it. To avoid this, he made it an inviolable rule for himself, and strictly forbade his children ever to say a word to any one to induce him to enter his congregation. He would not even suffer them to bias those who appeared to have an inclination to enter, nor was he backward in deciding against such an inclination. "Oh, sir," said he on one occasion, "we are not worthy to be compared to that other holy community. Go to it in the name of the Lord; you will be incomparably better off there than with us." When any one had taken

his final resolution, and begged admission into the congregation, he received him with the greatest circumspection. He examined into his motives, dispositions, talents, and family. He represented to him, with a sort of exaggeration, the difficulties attached to the state which he desired to embrace. He asked him whether he could bid an eternal adieu to parents, to his most intimate friends, and even to his country, should it be necessary to send him to foreign lands. He caused him to return several times before he gave him a final answer, that he might be better acquainted with him, and whatever trial he made of his dispositions and perseverance, he never gave his permission until the postulant had made a retreat to consult the will of God.

St. Francis of Sales, a great lover of holy simplicity, thus exhorts us to the practice of this virtue: "Let us listen to and imitate the Divine Saviour, who, like a most perfect psalmist, sings of the sovereign arrows of His love under the tree of the cross. He concludes them all thus: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' After we shall have said that, what remains but to expire and die the death of love, living no longer to ourselves, but Jesus Christ living in us? Then will cease all the disquietudes of our heart arising from self-love, and that tenderness for ourselves which breathes only in an atmosphere of satisfaction and consolation; and embarking in the exercises of our vocation with the mind of this holy and loving confidence, without perceiving our progress; without going, we shall advance; without changing our place, we shall make great way, as they do who sail in a deep sea with a favourable gale.

Then, all the events and all the varieties of accidents which supervene will be received sweetly and gently; for whoever is in the hands of God and reposes in His bosom, and whoever has abandoned himself to His love, has given himself up to His good pleasure, who is there that can shake or trouble him? Certainly, whatever he meets with, without amusing himself, without philosophizing on the causes, reasons, and motives of the events, he utters from his heart that holy acquiescence of the Saviour, 'Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.'"

THIRD DAY.

"God is a spirit, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth." [a]—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"God in His nature is most simple, and cannot admit of any duplicity. If we then would be conformable to Him, we should endeavour to become, by virtue, what He is by nature; that is to say, we should be simple in our affections, intentions, actions, and words; we should do what we find to do without artifice or guile, making our exterior conformable to our interior; we should have no other object but God in our actions, and seek to please Him alone in all things."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

Such was his simplicity. His exterior always corresponded with his interior. Whoever heard him speak might immediately know his heart. However diversified his employments, he had but one and the same aim, simply to please God.

[a] John iv. 24.

Hence it may he truly said, that he possessed the virtue of simplicity to such a degree, that all the powers of his soul were penetrated with it, and that everything he said or did sprang from it as from a fountain.

Surius gives the following anecdote of the simplicity of Phocas the martyr. He was a gardener, and cultivated an orchard, not so much for his own benefit as that he might have wherewith to feed pilgrims and travellers, who, on his liberality becoming known, frequented his house, and every applicant was sure of a courteous and charitable reception. This hospitable Phocas was at length denounced to the president of the province as a harbourer of proscribed Christians. Upon this, a troop of soldiers was sent to seize him privately and put him to death. They arrived in the evening and entered his house without knowing it, and with military freedom asked for something to eat. Phocas, as his manner was, readily complied with their demand; indeed, he waited upon them with so much civility and attention, that the men of arms said that they had never met with so good-hearted a fellow, and confiding in his candour and good nature, asked him if he knew a certain Phocas who sheltered the Christians, because they were in quest of him, with orders from the imperial prefect to kill him. The saint answered that he knew the man well, and would find him for them, but that as it was late, it was better for them to take some rest quietly, and he would put them into an easy way of getting him into their hands next morning. This night Phocas spent in devout prayers, and in the morning called the soldiers, and saluted them, telling them that the

man they were in search of was in the house, present, standing before them—that it was he himself. Astonished at his kind treatment, candour, and magnanimity, they could not bring themselves to execute their orders, and proposed to tell the prefect that the Phocas they had been in search of was not to be found. But the saint opposed their doing so, on the ground that his death would be a less evil than his consenting to an untruth. He desired them, therefore, to fulfil their commission, and with this request, bent his neck to the executioner, who with a single stroke cut off his head. The sincerity and simplicity of this holy martyr so pleased God, that many miraculous favours have been conferred on pilgrims and mariners who have sought his protection.

St. Francis of Sales, a great admirer and panegyrist of holy simplicity, was never tired of speaking of its excellence and beauty, and of recommending its practice to those who were under his charge. "True simplicity," says he, "consists in keeping the soul's three faculties—the memory, the understanding, and the will—unbiassed by earthly objects, and replenished solely with God. How happy should we be if we had Jesus only in our thoughts, Jesus in our memory, and Jesus alone in our will. The soul that is very attentive in pleasing her celestial Lover, has neither will nor time to think about herself, for her spirit tends whither it is attracted by love. Spiritual lovers, spouses of the heavenly King, do indeed view themselves, from time to time, like doves near most pure waters, to see whether they are pleasing to their Divine Lover; and this is done by the examens of con-

science, by which they cleanse themselves, and purify and adorn themselves the best they may, not to satisfy themselves, but to obey the Spouse, for the reverence they bear Him, and the extreme desire which they have to give Him pleasure. And is not this a love very pure, very simple, and very perfect, since they do not purify themselves in order to be pure, nor adorn themselves in order to be beautiful, but only to please their heavenly Lover, to whom, if ugliness were as pleasing, they would love it as much as beauty? And, moreover, these simple doves do not employ either an extremely long time, nor an unquiet anxiety, in cleansing and arraying themselves, because the confidence which their love gives them of being greatly loved, although unworthy, takes from them all disquietude and mistrust about their not being fair enough; besides, the desire of loving rather than of arraying and adorning themselves for love, takes from them all curious solicitude, and makes them contented with a sweet and faithful preparation made lovingly and with a good heart."

Simplicity is the sister of innocence and the daughter of charity. Simplicity makes us appear outwardly what we are inwardly. I do not mean that we are necessarily to exhibit those emotions of passion in our exterior that we may sometimes feel within; it is by no means contrary to simplicity to assume an agreeable appearance on such occasions, as some might suppose. There is a distinction which we are always bound to draw between the affections of the superior part of the soul and those of the inferior. We may experience great interior emotion on receiving a correction or contradiction, and this emotion not

proceed from the will; all this feeling then exists only in the inferior part of the soul: in such cases, by maintaining our composure, we manifest the dispositions of the superior part, which gives no consent to the disquietude which we suffer in the inferior. We have said that simplicity has ever in view the love of God, and the love of God requires us to restrain our feelings, and to subdue them, by complete mortification, so far from being required to manifest them outwardly. It is, therefore, no deviation from simplicity to maintain a cheerful mien when we feel disturbed interiorly. The best means to become simple is singly to desire to keep the heart near to God.

FOURTH DAY.

"Let us feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." [a] "Put off the old man, which is corrupted according to the desire of error, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, which, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth." [b]—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"The wisdom of this world overlays the heart with its schemes, and by its words conceals its intention: it represents what is false as true, and the truth as falsehood. This prudence is learnt in youth, from the example of those around; it is taught children as a thing of worth: they who have acquired it grow proud, and despise others; they who know it not, being subdued and brow-beaten, admire it in those who possess it: for this wicked duplicity is loved, under the fallacious title of urbanity. It teaches men to seek the honour of high places, to rejoice in the vain acquisition of temporal glory, to requite injuries suffered from others with interest, never to yield unless compelled, and, when obliged to do so, to feign a peaceful good nature in yielding. On the other hand, the wisdom of the just is to make no false appearances, to express their thoughts in their words, to love the simple truth for itself, to eschew falsehood, gladly to make known what is good, to suffer evil more readily than do it, in wrongs to seek no revenge, and to reckon contempt for the truth gain. But this simplicity of the just is ridiculed, for whatever truth sanctions seems weak and base to carnal wisdom."—*St. Gregory, Pope.*

It is generally remarked by the saints, that simplicity is a peculiar characteristic which distinguishes the children of light from the children of darkness. The former are meek, yielding, complying, forgiving, willing to suffer, truthful, silent, and gentle under rudeness and insult, suing for reconciliation when others would demand satis-

[a] 1 Cor. v. 8. [b] Ephes. iv. 22, 24.

faction, returning good for evil, kind and indulgent to the prejudices and the intractability of those with whom they have to deal. The latter are rash in their doings, quick in their sensibilities, jealous of their fame, eager in their attachments, obstinate in their judgment, violent in their resentments. Hence all the saints were particularly fond of this most beautiful and amiable virtue, and spared no pains in order to instil it into the hearts of those whom Providence placed under their charge. St. Vincent of Paul recommended it to all Christians, but especially to missionaries, and all persons who are actively engaged in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls. "The spirit of Christ," he used to say to the priests of his congregation, "is full of rectitude and sincerity; and all who are destined to work for His glory must act in accordance with His spirit. The most efficacious means for gaining persons of a cunning and crafty disposition to God, is to behave towards them with much simplicity. Pompous words do not avail for saving souls, but simplicity and humility obtain and draw down the blessings of God. As the spirit of dissimulation and deceit reign widely in the world, it is necessary to combat and overcome them by the spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, by sincerity and simplicity, without trusting to the arts or to the politics of men. Let our manner, therefore, ever be characterized by simplicity, avoiding all vain show, for such does not become our state. Our speech should be grave and modest, and free from that vicious affectation which ordinarily depraves the actions of worldly men." When one of his subjects publicly accused himself of having done something through

human respect, he reprimanded him severely, saying, that it would be better for a man to be bound hand and foot, and cast into the fire, than to act merely to please men. In reply to another who seemed to have somewhat deviated from the path of simplicity, he wrote the following rebuke: "Where is the candour which should distinguish a missionary, who ought always to keep God alone before his eyes? Remember that duplicity is most hateful to God, and that to be simple, we must have no other end in view but Him." And as he recommended it to others, so he acted himself. Above all things, he was most careful to avoid all sorts of intrigue, and everything that was underhand in his dealings with others. He had such a horror of lying, that he used to feel alarmed at the very shadow of it.

St. Francis of Sales looked upon holy simplicity as a most precious jewel, brought to us by our blessed Redeemer from Heaven, and one utterly unknown to the Pagan world. "This virtue," says he, "is peculiar to Christianity. The Pagans, even such as spoke in the most exalted manner of other virtues, possessed no knowledge of this, nor of humility. They wrote extremely well on nobility, liberality, and constancy; but not at all on simplicity and humility. Had not our Lord descended from Heaven to impart to men the knowledge of these two virtues, a profound ignorance of this necessary doctrine would have continued to prevail. *Be wise as serpents*, said He to His Apostles, but do not stop there; be moreover *simple as doves*. Learn of the dove to love God in simplicity of heart, having only one object or end, which is to please Him by corresponding to your vocation."

FIFTH DAY.

"Brethren, do not become children in sense, but in malice be children, and in sense be perfect." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"True simplicity is figured by that of infants at the breast, whose instincts admit of no secondary schemes. In his infancy a child has such simplicity that he knows no one but his mother—he has no love but for her—he has one only pleasure, which is to recline on her breast; when he reposes there, his wishes are fully satisfied. The soul that has attained to perfect simplicity loves but one thing, which is God, and has but one personal desire in the gratification of this love, which is to repose in His bosom: there, like a child of love, she fixes her abode; she puts herself, without reserve, under the care of His paternal providence, without any anxiety but what is found in maintaining this confidence."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The saint had perfect and childlike simplicity so much at heart, that when an opportunity offered he never failed to urge the practice of it. To the nuns of the Visitation, his religious daughters, he once said, "Commit yourselves to God's providence and to His sweet guidance, with the same simplicity that children trust themselves to their nurses: let Providence bear you in His right arm or His left, be ever resigned to the Divine will—a child never raises a difficulty about this; be reposed, whether He lays you down or takes you up; you are ever under the care of a tender parent, who knows what is suitable better than you yourselves. By all this I mean, that if Divine Providence permits you to experience afflictions or mortifications, you must not decline them, but accept them with a good heart and a loving tranquillity; if He should not send you

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 30.

any, do not desire them. In the same manner, if you are favoured with consolations, receive them with a spirit of gratitude, and acknowledge His bounty; if you feel none of these attractive delights, do not desire them. Labour to keep your heart in a state of preparation, to receive, as far as possible, with equanimity, any events ordained by the providence of God.

The fathers of the desert, who by the holiness of their lives have been a spectacle to the angels in Heaven, no less than to men upon earth, were particularly remarkable for this holy and child-like simplicity, especially in the manner in which they obeyed their superiors. We read that when St. John of Egypt retired from the world to put himself under an ancient religious, he obeyed him with so much simplicity and humility, that the good old father was filled with admiration; but to see whether his virtue was of a solid character, he made him do many things which seemed absurd, or were extremely difficult. The humble disciple obeyed immediately, and endeavoured to accomplish them with a wonderful fidelity, simplicity, and perseverance, never once allowing himself to reflect on the unreasonableness or difficulty of what was enjoined; but looking upon the order of his superior as the commandment of God himself, he believed all things possible to obedience. Once the old father, fixing a dry stick in the ground, bid him water *that tree* twice a day, and with his usual punctuality in matters of obedience, for the space of a whole year, he fulfilled this order constantly. Whether he was sick or well, or whatever other occupations might require his attention, it was all the same. At the end of the year, being asked by the old father

whether the tree had taken root yet, he simply replied he did not know, whereupon the father pulled up the stick and freed him from his labour.

A not less wonderful fact is told of St. Paul, surnamed, from his great simplicity, the Simple. This holy man was a plain, honest agricultural labourer, who led a blameless life to the age of sixty in a married state, when, having found his wife in adultery, he resolved to forsake both her and the world. After travelling eight days into the wilderness, he came to St. Anthony, and asked to be received into the number of his disciples, and taught the way to save his soul. St. Anthony said he was now too old to think of becoming a monk; that he could never bear the trials and hardships of a monastic life, especially of their eremitical rule: "Go," said he, "into the village, and there employ thyself in working for thy bread and praising God." Having said this, Anthony went in and shut his cell, and Paul, for three days and three nights, continued fasting and praying at the door. At length, seeing his constancy and perseverance, Anthony came out and told him, that the way to salvation was obedience, and that if he would be his disciple he must do everything he bid him. Paul readily assented, and made good his word by complying to a tittle with every injunction of the saint, how difficult or irrational soever it might seem. To try him, Anthony laid upon him a variety of labours, mortifications, and humiliations, till he assured himself that he was perfectly humble and simple, and a man entirely according to his own heart. One day, when many religious had come to St. Anthony to confer upon spiritual

things, Paul, who was of the company, hearing the prophets frequently spoken of, asked whether the prophets lived before our Saviour or after? St. Anthony, nodding to him, reproved him for his ignorant and ill-timed question, saying, "Go, hold your peace." Paul, who had resolved to obey every word that Anthony said to him, as though it were an oracle from God, immediately went away to his cell, and there kept such strict silence that he would not upon any account utter a single word. Anthony hearing this, commanded him to speak and explain the reason of so long a silence. "Father," said he, "I have been silent in obedience to your orders; you bid me go and hold my peace." Relating this anecdote to his other disciples, St. Anthony said, "This man condemns us all, for whilst we are so often wanting in our obedience to the counsels and even commands of our great and heavenly Master, he readily and scrupulously observes every single word, be it what it may, that he hears from my mouth."

SIXTH DAY.

"He who walketh in simplicity walketh securely." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"There is a species of simplicity that shuts the eyes to all natural feelings and human reasons, and fixes them solely on the maxims of faith, that is ever guided by them, so that in every thought or deed—in every business, accident, or place—it takes her divine maxims for its exclusive guide. This is admirable simplicity."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

Such was the simplicity of the great father of the faithful, the patriarch Abraham. God summoned him to leave his country, his family, his father's house, and to go to a strange land, which He would show him. And he obeyed with simplicity of heart; for tearing himself, without the slightest hesitation, from all these beloved objects, he readily set forth on his journey. On another occasion, God ordered him to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and go into the land of vision, and there to offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains. This order of Almighty God seemed to contradict the promise which He himself had made to the holy patriarch, that in his son Isaac He would bless and multiply his posterity, and must therefore have put Abraham's virtue to the severest trial. Yet the holy patriarch, shutting his eyes to all human reasoning, and fixing them upon God alone, bowed down with humble submission to God's holy will, instantly betook himself to fulfil it, and would have executed with courage and sim-

(a) Prov. x. 9.

plicity the sorrowful work, had not God, satisfied with his obedience, revoked the command, giving him moreover the promise of the Messiah in his seed. Such also was the simplicity of the Apostles, who, disregarding the threats and menaces of the Council, which forbad them to preach Jesus Christ whom they had crucified, applied themselves with courage and perseverance to fulfil their holy mission, preaching everywhere the name of Jesus. And when for this they were brought before the court of the high priest, who charged them, saying: "Commanding, we commanded you not to teach in this name, and behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." The answer which Peter and the Apostles gave was this: "We ought to obey God rather than man."(a) After St. Francis of Sales had acquired the highest reputation for his sublime virtue, God permitted a most infamous calumny to be spread against him, manifesting thereby the more his admirable simplicity. It would be impossible to describe the injury which this wicked and artful attack did to the holy prelate; the innocent life which he had led so constantly from his tenderest years, his firmness, his zeal, his piety so generally acknowledged, and that brilliant sanctity which God has been pleased to honour with miracles, could not, when all combined, withstand the dark calumny, nor support his reputation in the minds of men. Even those who thought they knew him better, and were indisposed to form an unfavourable judgment, were filled with anxiety, perplexity, and confusion, and knew not what opinion to

(a) Acts v. 28, 29.

entertain. When the infamous report was told to the holy bishop, without being at all disturbed, or losing any of his wonted calmness, he said, with great simplicity: "I only value my good name as far as it assists me to love God and to promote His glory. He knows how much I require for this purpose, and I wish for no more. I willingly leave it to Him to give or preserve me only as much as is necessary for my serving Him and fulfilling His holy will." The blessed mother, Jane Frances de Chantal, speaking of this her holy father, says, that everything in his soul was calm and regular; there was nothing there but purity, humility, simplicity, and union with God. She hesitates not to add, that the holy prelate was a living image of our Redeemer, and that the habit and elevation of his soul was altogether supernatural and divine. St. Alfonsus Liguori, also, so much excelled in holy simplicity as to afford great edification to all around him. To perfect his virtue, God was pleased to send him, in the close of his life, a most tremendous trial, permitting him to be deposed from his office of President of the Congregation he had founded, as utterly unworthy to fill such a station, and Father Paul appointed in his place. Upon this, he not only never uttered the slightest complaint, but with great humility and simplicity wrote to the said father, expressing joy at his appointment. He was so indifferent about his deposition, that when Father Emanuel Calderara, of the Oratory, came to visit him and condole with him, testifying his great displeasure at the election of the new president, Alphonsus, having heard him in silence, made no other answer than this: "I care little about my dignity of rector-major being

taken from me; it is enough for me that they have not taken Jesus my Saviour, and my mother Mary, away from me." A religious asked him if a schism had really been made. He replied, with great simplicity: "Yes, there has been some misunderstanding between us, for several have wished to separate themselves from us: but we pray to God for them, and they also pray for us, so I hope that both we and they are agreeable to God, and that we shall all become saints."

SEVENTH DAY.

"Every mocker is an abomination to the Lord, and His converse is with the simple." [a]—*The Wise Man.*

"God loves and freely communicates with the simple, and imparts to them a knowledge of His truth, according to His will; but not so with the proud and high-minded."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The holy prophet David—the man according to God's own heart—after encouraging the princes of the people to contribute liberally to the building of the temple, addressed the Lord as follows: "I know, my God, that thou provest hearts and lovest simplicity; wherefore, I also, in the simplicity of my heart, have joyfully offered all these things; and I have seen with great joy Thy people which are here present offer Thee their offerings." [b] Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical history are full of examples illustrative

[a] Prov. iii. 32. [b] 1 Paral. xxix. 17.

of the particular love which God bears to simplicity, and how dear simple souls are to His heart. We have a striking proof of this in holy Job, who is represented as a person highly distinguished for his simplicity and uprightness of heart. Although God apparently abandoned him by giving the devil leave to exert his cruelty against him, yet the eyes of the Lord were constantly upon him to protect him from harm; and after a short trial, He delivered him entirely from the power of the enemy, and endowed him with His choicest blessings.

The apostle St. Bartholomew, being a most simple man, a true Israelite in whom there was no guile, merited not only to be praised by Christ for this virtue in the Gospel, but also to be raised to the sublime office of the apostleship, and to reach the highest degree of holiness, which he perfected by spending his life in preaching the Gospel, and crowning it with the most cruel martyrdom.

In the funeral oration which St. Ambrose made over his brother St. Satirus, amongst his other virtues he exalts the child-like simplicity, which was reflected in him as in a mirror, and declares that this his holy simplicity made him most dear to God, who, being a simple spirit, is pleased with simple souls.

Holy simplicity was one of the chief characteristics which marked the life of St. Francis of Assissium, and in consequence of this he was most beloved by God, who raised him to a most intimate union with his Divine Majesty. Besides bestowing upon him a most sublime gift of contemplation, by which his life had become in a manner a continual rapture, He favoured him

with the inestimable privilege of bearing in his body the visible marks of Christ's passion, so that he became in his mortal body a living image of his crucified Redeemer.

History tells us that Paul the Simple, on account of his admirable simplicity, had obtained so much favour with God, and was rewarded by him with such admirable gifts and graces, as to work even more and greater miracles than St. Anthony himself; and this holy abbot used to send to Paul such possessed persons as he himself could not cure, an instance of which is thus recorded by Palladius. A young man, possessed by a furious and most obstinate devil, being brought to Anthony, the saint told the bystanders that this was one of the principal demons, and that the power of casting them out was not as yet given to him, but was given to the humble and simple Paul. Having, therefore, taken the poor youth to Paul, he said, "Here, cast out the devil from this man, that he may return home and glorify God." "Why don't you do it yourself?" said Paul. "I have something else to do," replied Anthony; and so hastened back to his cell. Paul fell prostrate in prayer, and then rising up, said to the devil, in his innocent way: "Get thee gone out of the man; Father Anthony says thou must go out." The devil called him a foolish old man, and told him he would not: and when he urged him a second time, repeating that Anthony said he must go out, he abused both him and Anthony, calling them by contemptuous names, and still refused to depart. "If thou wilt not go out," said Paul, "I will go and tell Jesus Christ, and it shall be worse for thee." The devil broke out into blas-

phemies against Christ, and obstinately kept his hold. The holy man, therefore, went out of his cell, in the broiling heat of the sun at noonday, and standing upon a rock, addressed his prayer to Jesus Christ crucified, protesting, in his simplicity, that he would neither come down from the rock, nor eat nor drink, till He was pleased to hear him, and to force the devil out of the man; when, whilst he was at prayer, the devil roared out: "I go, I go, I suffer violence; this is an intolerable tyranny; I am departing from the man, never, never more to return. It is Paul's humility and simplicity that casts me out; I know not whither I must go." With these words the man was presently delivered. Blessed, therefore, is the man who walketh in simplicity, and by a great purity of heart aims only at pleasing his bountiful and sovereign Lord. "With two wings," says the Imitation of Christ, "man is lifted up above earthly things; that is, by simplicity and purity. Simplicity must be in the intention, purity in the affection. Simplicity aims at God, purity takes hold of Him, and tastes Him. Oh! how great peace and tranquillity would he possess who would cut off all vain solicitude, and only think of the things of God and His salvation, and place his whole hope in God."

EIGHTH DAY.

"God will keep the salvation of the righteous, and protect them that walk in simplicity." (a) "He that walketh in simplicity shall be saved." (b)—*The Wise Man.*

"There is a certain simplicity of heart in which consists the perfection of all perfections. This is when the soul fixes her intention only in God, and retires into herself, in order to attend, with great diligence and simplicity, to the fulfilment of the rules and duties prescribed to her, without turning her mind to desire or to undertake anything else. In this way, not actuated by her own will, nor doing anything extraordinary, she is not much gratified with her own doings, nor elated; but God Himself is pleased with her simplicity, by which she becomes most dear to His heart, and attains to a special union with Him."—*St. Francis of Sale.*

St. Bernard used to say, that the best means to become a saint is, not to perform extraordinary things, which attract other people's attention, but to direct all our energies to discharge the common duties of our holy vocation in an uncommon manner, viz., with the greatest possible perfection. The holy mother, Jane Frances of Chantal, excelled in the practice of this kind of simplicity, and had abundant experience of its good effects. She tried also to establish the same in the hearts of her spiritual daughters. To one of them, who asked her advice by letter, she gave the following counsel:—"Daughter, by daily seeking distinct steps to perfection, you will only lose time and embarrass your mind more and more. The best way I can point out to you is this, viz., to combine all your endeavours in a faithful observance

(a) Prov. ii. 7. (b) Ibid. xxviii. 18.

of the rules, and in an exact performance of what is prescribed to you from time to time."

It is related of the venerable Berckmans, that from the time of his entering Religion until his death his whole study was to fulfil, with great perfection, the rules and practices of the society to which he belonged, and he never thought of doing extraordinary things: by this means he attained to a sublime degree of holiness.

A religious, who was charged with the office of porter, once complained to St. Ignatius, that he was much interrupted in his union with God, and distracted by so many calls at the door. The saint answered:—"Receive those who come to you for spiritual advice, and help them with great charity; and as soon as you are called to go to them, make some ejaculatory prayer, praying God to assist the soul of him who sends for you; then direct all your thoughts and words to his case, and your interruption will be to your own great advantage. If you find that you are not so united to God as before, nor so calm, do not let it grieve you, for such distraction as comes from working for God's glory cannot really hurt you; but if people come to bring you news, or for useless conversation, speak to them prudently on death, on the enormity of sin, of judgment, of examination of conscience, and confession; and repeat this as often as they come to you. Those who come to receive help will go away with profit, and those who have no concern for their own souls will leave you in peace, and not return to disturb you." Actuated by the same sentiments, St. Teresa was wont to say, "The disgust we experience when we have not been absorbed in God a great part of the day, through being otherwise

employed in works of obedience and charity, springs from a very subtle self-love in disguise: it is a desire to please ourselves rather than God."

In the lives of the Fathers of the Desert we read, that as St. Pacomius was one day making mats, a boy, who stood by looking, said:—"Dear father, you are not working right; that is not the way to do it." This great saint, though skilled in the art, rose from his seat at once and placed himself near the child, who showed him how he was to proceed. Thereupon one of the religious said, "Father, you are committing two faults, in consenting to the will of that child, for you expose him to the danger of vanity and you spoil your mats, which were better made as you were doing them." But the man of God replied: "My dear brother, if God should permit this child to take vanity from what I have done, perhaps He may recompense me with humility; and when I have received it, I may afterwards be able to communicate a share of it to this child. It is of very little consequence whether reeds be twisted this or that way for making mats, but it is of the utmost consequence that we should take to heart that celebrated sentence of our Redeemer, 'Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not share in the kingdom of my Father.'"

It is recorded, in the life of St. Gertrude, that her superior, who was well aware of the weakness and delicacy of her constitution, treated her with more tenderness than the other religious, and did not suffer her to practise the austerities sanctioned by the rule. What path did this holy virgin pursue, in order to become a saint? No other than that of simple submission to the will of the superior; and though her fervour would have led

her to follow the example of the others, she never indicated any wish of the kind. For when she was ordered to go to bed, she went with all simplicity, without reply, being full well assured that, through obedience, she should enjoy the presence of her beloved in her bed, as well as if she were in the choir with her sisters. To give a proof of the great peace and tranquillity of mind which she acquired by this practice, our Lord revealed to St. Methtilda, her companion, that if they wished to find Him in this life, they must look for him first in the holy sacrament of the altar, and then in the heart of Gertrude.

NINTH DAY.

"I would have you to be without solicitude." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"When a man thinks he has done what God requires of him for the success of any affair, he should rest in peace, whatever may be the result, being content with the testimony of his own conscience."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

St. Francis of Sales used often to teach, and to recommend, the same thing. "A simple soul," says he, "in acting, examines whether what is to be done or said be expedient, and then sets to work, without losing time in an inquiry what others may think or do. Having done what was judged proper, she thinks no more about it, and rejects, as a temptation, any anxiety relative to

(a) 1 Cor. vii. 32.

the opinion of others. In fact, having no other end in view but to please God, she allows no consideration to interfere with this paramount object.

"If you happen to say or do what is not approved of by all, you ought not, on that account, to scrutinise your words and actions. It is, no doubt, self-love that makes us anxious whether what we have done or said be, or be not, approved of. Simplicity does not run after applause; it leaves every event to the holy disposition of Providence, and follows the even tenour of its way, turning neither to the right nor to the left. Do not reason upon your sufferings and contradictions, but endure them with mildness and patience; it is sufficient to know they come from God. To reason continually upon one's own actions tends to a great loss of time, which might be much better employed; and things go wrong by too minutely observing whether we act well. Those who reflect so much upon trifles are like silkworms, that are fettered and embarrassed by their own labour."

This holy bishop one evening visited the Carthusian Monastery, near Grenoble, and the superior, a man of great learning and piety, received him courteously; but, after the usual civilities, he took his leave, saying it was the hour for matins. On his way he met the procurator, who, on hearing why the bishop was left alone, observed, matins may be said at any time, but as so meritorious a prelate was not every day to be seen in their monastery, attention should be shown to their guest. "I think you are right," said the abbot, and going back to the illustrious visitor, apologised for the unintentional

rudeness. The holy bishop, astonished at so much simplicity and candour, was more edified than if he had witnessed a miracle.

Animated by this spirit of holy simplicity, this saint never sought to know whether what he said or did was pleasing to others; and when it was reported to him that some action of his was blamed, he calmly replied: "It is no wonder, since the works of Christ our Lord were not approved of by all, and not a few even still blame them." To a nun, who described the anxieties of her soul to the saint, he observed: "That although the path she was following was a very good one, he must find fault with her for too minutely counting all her steps, through fear of falling. Do not," he continued, "disturb yourself so much. God is good; He sees what you are. Your irregular inclinations are only left to give occasion to your will to conform itself the better with that of God. Elevate your mind to a perfect confidence in His goodness: be not solicitous. This Christ recommended to Martha, even in doing good. Do not so closely examine your soul's progress: be not over-righteous, but proceed gently in your ordinary exercises. Be not anxious about the morrow. As to your advancement, God, who has hitherto conducted you, will guide you to the end. Remain tranquil in the holy loving trust which you ought to have in the sweet providence of God."

It is related, in the lives of the holy Fathers of the Desert, that a young religious, desirous of his own perfection, resolved to free his heart from every failing, on which account he applied himself to examine all his actions in such a manner that his life was wholly occupied in anxious and scru-

pulous examination. But the more he thought to shun defects, the more he committed them, and while he thought to avoid slight imperfections, he fell into grievous disquietude. At length he went and asked advice of an old, experienced religious, who merely suggested to him this double counsel of the Holy Spirit: "Fili in mansuetudine serva animam tuam, in mansuetudine perfice opera tua." "Son, preserve thy soul in meekness, and gently perform thy actions." Following this advice, he soon regained his peace of mind, and advanced much in perfection in a short time.

TENTH DAY.

"Woe to them that are of a double heart and deceitful lips, and with hands set upon evil, and to the sinner that turneth two ways." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Dissemblers and crafty men provoke the wrath of God." (b)—*Holy Job.*

THE vice of duplicity and hypocrisy is most hateful to God and man. It is hateful to God, because it is directly opposed to His nature, for He is essential truth. It is hateful to man, because it destroys the bond of union, so necessary in civil and religious societies, which rests on mutual trust. But what more than anything else shows the hatefulness of this vice, is our Saviour's conduct towards the hypocritical Pharisees.

(a) Eccles. ii. 14. (b) Job xxxvi. 13.

We know that sinners of all kinds applied to our blessed Redeemer, even those who had been guilty of the most shameful crimes, and all were received by him with great kindness and compassion. He listened to their supplications, took pity on their misery, and acted towards them as a tender father, comforting them in their distress, and healing their diseases, whether corporal or spiritual. The Pharisees, also, often approached and discoursed with Him. But how did he receive them? How did he speak to them? To think of the fearful language in which he addressed them is enough to make one tremble. Grievously offended, because they concealed most wicked hearts under an exterior show of sanctity, he uttered the most terrible woes against them. "Of what use," said he to them, "is your exterior purity? You may, indeed, deceive men by it, because they only see what is without, but you cannot hide your true selves from God, whose eye penetrates into the most hidden recesses of the heart. You desire that he who sits at table with you should have clean hands, well-washed clothes, and his body pure and spotless; but what is this, if his soul be full of filth, deceit, injustice, iniquity, and theft? You think that you pay honour to God by this cleansing, and believe it sufficient to make you pious and religious. But, what delusion! You are, indeed, blind and ignorant, and without excuse. If God desires to be honoured by your exterior propriety, does he not still more desire the good ordering of your interior, which is the best part of man? Who has taught you that God receives offence by a breach of His law through unwashed hands and soiled plates, and not still more by the impurity and

depraved affections of the heart? Oh, blind and scrupulous Pharisees! why not begin by purifying the interior? This would diminish your labour; for by cleansing your interior, you would also render your exterior beautiful and pleasing in the sight of God. Woe to you Pharisees, for your piety consists in troubling yourselves for things of no moment; and beneath this care you are overbearing and cruel, and your consciences are laden with abominable crimes, hid by this devout exterior. Of what avail are your affected scruples, whilst you trample under foot the most essential laws of justice, mercy, and truth, whilst you lay aside charity to God and your neighbour? These things you should have done first, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides! ignorant teachers! What new religion is this? to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel whole! Woe to you, unhappy men, who are satisfied with the outward varnish of a useless piety, whilst your hearts are full of iniquity! Oh, hypocrites, you are like whited sepulchres, which are outwardly beautiful, but which are within filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness! You appear to men to be just, but you are interiorly full of hypocrisy and sin."

St. Ignatius had the greatest horror of hypocrisy, and looked upon those who were guilty of it with an eye of abomination and contempt. He used to say, that a hypocrite cannot remain long in a holy community, because long dissimulation is too difficult, and because God will not endure him. There was at Rome a brother who was suspected of being addicted to this vice; and when Father Olivier, who informed the saint of it, asked if he would forbid him the communion,

to take away any doubt of his receiving it sacrilegiously, he answered: "No; leave him to God, and he will discover him." So it proved, and the unhappy man was expelled from the society.

ELEVENTH DAY.

"Laying aside all malice, and all guile and dissimulations, and envies and all detractions, as new-born babes desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation." (a)—*The Apostle St. Peter.*

"Craftiness is the accumulation of artifices, intrigues, deceits, and appearances, to mislead the minds of those with whom we converse. This is quite the reverse of simplicity, which requires that the outside should correspond with what is within."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

WHEN a friend once said, that this saint would have succeeded in political negotiations, the holy bishop observed: "The mere word 'policy' alarms me, and I comprehend it but little. I know not how to disguise my sentiments, and cannot counterfeit, or lie boldly, in which too generally political management consists. That which is in my heart is on my tongue, and for duplicity I have a mortal hatred, knowing what an abomination it is before God."

The blessed Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, greatly abominated all sorts of craftiness and dissimulation, and used to say, "I greatly detest duplicity and dissimulation; what I have in my heart I have also on my

(a) 1 Peter ii. 1.

tongue. Jesus Christ says, 'Est, est, non, non.'" There was no action in which he did not evince this truly evangelical simplicity, by which all who conversed with him were edified. The Sovereign Pontiff, Clement XIV., scarcely became acquainted with him, when still a cardinal, before he conceived a strong affection for him; and the reason was, as he said, because he found in Father Paul a man made after the old fashion, who went about everything with veracity and frankness; and after being made pope, he would often say: "I know Father Paul; he is a man of great simplicity." Father Paul had so great a horror of falsehood, that he would rather, as he said himself with strong feeling, let his head be cut off than tell one single lie; and it was plain, from his love of truth and frankness, that he could not endure lies and dissimulation in others. But if there was a question of direction, confessions, missions, or other affairs relating to God's glory, and particularly to the government of the congregation, he was all attention, caution, and circumspection. He thought of everything, foresaw everything, knew how to remove cleverly every obstacle, and clearly showed that his simplicity did not proceed from want of talent, or bluntness of perception, but from great innocence of morals, and extreme purity of heart; and that whatever he might be, he knew well how to act with due reflection and discreet discernment.

Still more wonderful was the hatred that the holy Eleazar, one of the greatest heroes of the Jewish nation, bore to every kind of dissimulation and deceit. His history, which has always been a subject of much admiration and edification to those who have considered it by the light of

God, is thus given in the second book of the Machabees, chap. vi. Eleazar, one of the chief of the scribes, a man advanced in years, and of a comely countenance, was pressed to eat swine's flesh; but he, choosing a glorious death to a hateful life, voluntarily prepared for suffering. He determined not to do anything unlawful for the love of life, and considering how that must be purchased, chose death: but they that stood by, moved with mistaken pity, through their old friendship for him, taking him aside, proposed that such flesh should be brought as was lawful for him to eat, so that he might appear to have eaten—according to the king's commandment—of the flesh of the sacrifice, and thus be delivered from death: they did him this in courtesy, for the sake of their old friendship for him. But he, considering the honour of his grey head, and his good life and conversation from a child, answered without delay, that he would rather die. "It doth not become our age," continued he, "to dissemble; for thereby many young persons might think that Eleazar, at the age of fourscore and ten years, was gone over to the life of the heathen, and so, through my dissimulation for a little time of a corruptible life, be deceived, and bring a stain and a curse upon my old age. And if I should by this dissimulation be delivered from the present punishments of men, yet I should not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither alive nor dead. But by departing manfully out of this life, I shall show myself worthy of my old age, and leave an example of fortitude to young men; suffering, with a ready and constant mind an honourable death, for the most venerable and most holy laws." Having spoken thus, he was

carried to execution. They led him to it, who had been a little before disposed to compassionate him, incensed at the words he had spoken, which they thought were uttered out of arrogancy. When ready to die with stripes, he groaned and said: "O Lord, holy in judgment, Thou knowest that whereas I might be delivered from death, I suffer grievous pains in body, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things, because I fear Thee." Thus did this holy man die, leaving not only to young men, but also to the whole nation, in the memory of his death, an example of virtue and fortitude.

TWELFTH DAY.

"Lord who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in Thy holy hill?

"He that walketh without blemish and worketh justice.

"He that speaketh truth in his heart—that hath not used deceit in his tongue.

"Nor hath done evil to his neighbour, nor taken up a reproach against his neighbour." (a)—*Holy David.*

"We must avoid every kind of affectation, whether in talking, dressing, or anything else."—*St. Philip Neri.*

"Let us, in our manner of speaking, be mild, open, sincere simple, and upright: let us beware of duplicity, dissimulation, and artifice."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Francis's words, and personal habit, on this subject, well agree. Nothing could be more orderly, more simple, or more uniform than his manner of life; he carefully avoided all affected

(a) Psalm xiv. 1—3.

singularity, which but too often is designed to attract the esteem of men; he shunned that particularity in the external adjustment of his person, which, without regulating the affections of the heart, serves but to create a false impression of superior sancity. In his furniture, table, and dress, he was neat, but modest; his conversation was engaging, agreeable, and easy, without affectation and without constraint; he was a kind and even a warm friend, sincere and simple, but prudent and possessed of the gift of secrecy. His eyes and his countenance portrayed an air of peace and serenity which indicated the purity of his heart; he was civil and well mannered, possessed of a thorough knowledge of propriety and decorum, and attentive to its observance, but without too nice and scrupulous attachment to external forms.

He frequently observed that true piety is by no means incompatible with the social virtues, nor with those attentions which give a charm to civil society; that in order to be devout, it is not necessary to neglect cleanliness, to affect a roughness of manners, to exhibit a clownish rudeness, and to be divested of gentleness and politeness of deportment; that, on the contrary, it is a duty to gain all hearts by an amiable and interesting manner, such as may contribute to render virtue lovely and attractive; that sullen sadness and scrupulous fear cannot be said to form the character of true piety; that the grand object of Christians should be to serve God with joy and with a holy liberty, and that nothing is so opposite to the spirit of Christianity as restless uneasiness or servile constraint. His dress was simple, free from affectation; he trimmed his hair and beard

according to the prevailing fashion, so that altogether his appearance was but little different from that of those who were accounted respectable in the world.

Of the same description was the simplicity of St. Vincent of Paul. He never knew the ways of equivocation or the tortuous windings of the world. Always ingenuous, always upright; if he did not always tell every truth, because secrets which he was bound to keep were entrusted to him, he never said or insinuated anything contrary to truth. "A simple man," says he, "looks to God, and wishes to please Him alone. If he does not discover all his thoughts—for simplicity is a discreet virtue—he takes care to avoid whatever may induce any one to believe that he has in his mind what he really has not. In a word, he is simple in everything; simple in his thoughts, simple in his actions, and simple in speaking." Simplicity in speaking, and above all, in the instructions given to the people, was a point which this saint was never tired of inculcating. His great fear was, lest his spiritual children should have, like many others, the fault of wishing to acquire a name by showy discourses. "Men wish to shine," said he, "wish to be spoken of, wish to hear it said that they have succeeded well. Cursed pride, how much good dost thou corrupt! For these men preach themselves, and not Jesus Christ; and instead of edifying, they ruin and destroy." One day he threw himself on his knees, at the feet of one of his priests, to conjure him to make his instructions to candidates for orders in a simple manner.

St. Catharine of Bologna had the greatest aversion to all sorts of affectation, and strove

with all her might to banish it from the community over which she presided. On one occasion, whilst she was mistress of the Novices, she thus spoke to them: "Although you have the right to come to me, you ought not to make use of it, merely through a desire of spiritual satisfaction and consolation, but only when your welfare and advantage require you to do so. Instead of coming to refresh and cheer yourselves half an hour with me, rather employ the time in meditating upon our Saviour's passion, with groans and tears. This devotion will be your best and most perfect mistress, and you will find in it your sweetest joy: but if, on the other hand, some trouble disturbs you, I wish you to come to me, whether in the day-time or at night; and if I am asleep, wake me up, and disclose to me your temptations with simplicity. But this direction you do not always observe, and hence comes a great loss of time to me as well as to yourselves. It is my duty to mention this fault to you, and to make you see the inconveniences and folly of it. A temptation, for example, troubles you, and the thought at once occurs to you to come and declare it to me. Very well; this inspiration is from God. To correspond to it, you start, and you come as far as the door of my chamber, but all at once you feel quite choked, and, as if you were in a fever, you accordingly go back; then you come again, then go back and return a third time. How much time is lost in this way, were this even the only inconvenience! However, you summon up your courage and knock: I answer, and then you are at last in my presence. But you begin then to feel more choked than before, and you are so afraid, that you cannot speak: of

course, I must speak in your stead, and all that I can say before you begin, are words thrown away, that you might easily spare me. After encouragements from me for a longer or shorter time, at last comes a deep sigh, followed by this phrase: 'My mother, it is because I am so timid.' Then comes a new silence, which is followed by fresh words of encouragement from me, that seem about to elicit something at last: 'Heaven be praised,' I say to myself, 'she is going to speak after all;' but no, not at all: to the first word I was so delighted at hearing, succeeds a new choking fit, which brings on a sigh, and then again silence. I wait for the second word, which comes at last; but then I must wait for the third: in short, we employ a good hour at this affair, which could be settled in an instant. My dear daughters, I ought to tell you, this way of proceeding is from the devil, and not from God. Do you want me to be really useful to you? Whisper in my ear, anywhere you meet me: 'My mother, I have had such a thought; I have been foolish enough to do such a thing; give me a penance.' And after you have heard my answer, do not go away, dragging one foot after the other like children, but go away promptly, and do what I have told you."

Actuated by the same love for holy simplicity, the Venerable Benedict Labré was greatly on his guard, not to show those external marks of fervour, which have more of the appearance than of the substance of devotion; for instance, to weep aloud, to sigh very audibly, to kiss the ground, to speak to our Lord in prayer so as to be heard, and other acts, which often disturb the devotion of others, and sometimes foment the spirit of hypocrisy.

He usually selected a secret and retired place in the church to pray quietly, though he could not by this means succeed in avoiding the observation of others, who, admiring his piety, went on purpose to watch him, without his perceiving it. But no affectation or ostentation was to be seen that could strike the eyes of others in his almost continual prayer; and he prayed with so much simplicity, that exteriorly those supernatural lights with which God favoured him were not perceptible; he remained quiet and immovable, kneeling sometimes with his hands crossed on his breast, sometimes in the act of holding some pious book open, which furnished fuel to the fire of his love; never did he turn his head or his eyes; thus his prayer was a great example and a source of edification to any one who looked at him. It is true that sometimes he was seen to make extraordinary movements; but this happened, either because being transported fervour, he was not aware of it, or because he could not resist the impetuosity of the internal flame of love which burned in his breast; and as is the case with ecstatic persons, the soul, entirely absorbed in God, no longer knows where the body is, nor what is done to it, though others use iron or fire to bring them to themselves.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"Speak ye truth every one to his neighbour." (a)—*The Prophet Zachary.*

"God preserve us from flattering and praising any one, to procure his good will and favour. Such vile motives are alien to the spirit of Jesus Christ, for whose sake principally we should perform our every action. Let us do much for the love of God, careless about human respect; let us work for our neighbour's salvation, without minding the judgments of the world."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

This saint, though very gentle in his expressions and manner towards all, never flattered any one. He used to say, there was nothing so mean and unworthy of a Christian, nor so hateful to spiritual-minded persons, as flattery. He was careful not to praise another in his presence, unless it were necessary to encourage the pusillanimous and animate them in virtue. He would never allow his own subjects to do anything to procure human patronage; and, in a letter to one of his religious, he says, "I approve of your having acquired the friendship of those persons you speak of, but not the motive, viz., to secure their protection. Your motive is base, and far from the spirit of Christ, for whose sake we must do everything; you, on the contrary, consulting your interest, have employed the friendship and benevolence of others to preserve your reputation, but that, if it be not founded on truth, is always vain. If you build upon truth, what have you to fear? Remember, that double-dealing does not please God, and

(a) Zach. viii. 16.

that we should have no other aim than His pleasure."

St. Francis of Sales gave the following advice to the true lovers of Christian simplicity: "If anybody happens to forget something, let him sincerely acknowledge his error, and, when questioned about what he does not know, let him openly confess his ignorance, and leave crooked answers to the worldly-wise."

This was the saint's invariable mode of proceeding. Whenever he was asked a favour which he could not grant, he respectfully, but sincerely, said, that he could not comply with the request. On being sometimes thanked, in mistake, by certain parties, for favours received, he ingenuously disclaimed their thanks. He was a foe to intrigue and dissimulation, and he used to say, that by stating matters as they really were, they always turned out well, having God's blessing upon them.

St. Charles Borromeo, in like manner, never deluded people with fine words, according to the custom of courtiers; but, when asked for advice, or an opinion, or a favour, he simply made known his mind and intention: he never promised what he did not think right to perform, but with his refusal he gave his reasons to the suppliant. In this manner he acted towards persons of all classes, and, from this, more credit was given to his word than to a written document, and persons of rank were glad to consult him about their most important affairs.

When Pope Innocent XII. in Rome prohibited a certain work, written by Fénélon, archbishop of Cambray; this virtuous prelate no sooner received the brief of condemnation, than, to show his

obedience to the Supreme Pontiff, he ascended the pulpit in his own cathedral, and read it publicly. Not satisfied with this, after condemning the marked propositions himself, he forbade, amid the tears and sobs of his audience, this much-attached people to read or keep his proscribed work.

We also read of the venerable M. Margaret Alacoque, that she had the greatest horror of all kind of artifice and flattery. Writing to a person who was not very careful to walk in the path of simplicity, she thus addresses her: "I speak plainly; I cannot reconcile these two things together—that a soul, who wishes to belong entirely to God, should commit, frequently and voluntarily, failings against sincerity, and be guilty of certain windings and concealments in her words and actions; not going the straight way, nor seeking God alone in all her dealings, without any artifice. For my part, I will do neither more nor less when alone than when in the sight of creatures, since my God sees me everywhere, and penetrates the most secret folds of my heart."

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"I say, by the grace that is given me, to all that are among you, not to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise, but to be wise unto sobriety." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"There are souls so much engaged in considering what they shall do, that they lose the time of action; but in everything respecting our perfection, which consists in the union of the soul with God, little knowledge and much practice is what is demanded. It appears to me that, when asked to point out the road to heaven, we might very rationally reply with those who say, that to reach a particular place we must go straight forward and keep moving, putting one foot before the other, and, by that simple operation, we will soon arrive at the object of our wishes. 'Always advance,' may be said to those souls so solicitous to attain perfection; 'pursue the path of your vocation with simplicity; be more attentive to act than to form desires. This is the shortest way.'"

"If you walk with simplicity in the observance of your rule, you may serve God with great perfection, without expending your faculties or seeking to learn other things. Learning is not necessary in order to love God, as St. Bonaventure justly observes, for an ignorant woman is as capable of loving God as the most learned divine. In the business of perfection, little knowledge and much practice is demanded."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint relates the history of two religious, who, in opposite ways, because they were not contented with knowing and fulfilling the duties of their calling, but wished to know more than was suitable for them to know, fell into a most serious delusion, and, instead of advancing in the path of virtue, seriously obstructed it. "I remember," says the saint, "conversing with two religious women, belonging to two different reformed orders. One of them, by reading the

(a) Rom. xii. 3.

books of St. Teresa, learned so well to imitate her manner of speaking, that Mother Teresa seemed revived in her person. She was herself perfectly convinced of this, and she so worked up her imagination, by repassing in her mind all St. Teresa had done during her life, that she thought she experienced the same things, even the flights of the spirit and suspensions of the powers of the soul, just as she read in the saint's works, and she spoke of them with the greatest precision. The other religious woman to whom I alluded was of a different turn of mind. She never experienced any interior gratification, in consequence of her anxiety in seeking and desiring the best road and the best method of perfection; and, though she was always attentive in following perfection, she was still perpetually tortured with the imagination that there might be some better method of perfection different from that which had been taught her; thus, one of these nuns lived satisfied with a mere imaginary sanctity, and neither sought or desired anything else: the other was continually disquieted by supposing herself destitute of sanctity, because her real advancement was concealed from her. Interior modesty keeps the soul between these two extremes, so as to be satisfied with desiring what is necessary, and nothing further." This was exactly the practice which the saint pursued in directing St. Jane Frances of Chantal. He recommended to her humility, contempt of the world and of herself, simplicity, love of abjection, and the service of the poor and the sick; and he assigned her, as her dwelling-place, the foot of the cross, telling her that it should be her glory to be despised, and that she should reckon as her crown

her misery, her littleness, and her abjection. Some very spiritual persons, seeing this holy widow endowed with such high dispositions for the interior life, wished to urge her on, but the blessed Father said to her, "No, no; be content with spinning the threads of the little virtues of humility, sweetness, mortification, simplicity, and others which are suitable to widows; he who tells you otherwise deceives, and is deceived."

From the same principle of holy simplicity, the saint condemned those who are over-anxious to see with their own eyes the progress which they make in the spiritual life, and disturb themselves when they cannot see that they are advancing in virtue. To persons of this description he recommends peace and confidence in God, and assures them that if they are attentive to fulfil with diligence their ordinary duties, they will certainly advance in holiness, although they do not perceive it. "It is with us," says the saint, "as it is with those who are on a voyage by sea; they know not what progress they make, though the master pilot, who is acquainted with the wind and tides, does. We are unable to judge of our own advancement, though we may form some estimate of that of others; we cannot have any assurance when we perform a good action that we have done it with due perfection, since humility forbids such an opinion."

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"It is not good to load ourselves with many spiritual exercises; it is better to undertake a little, and go on with it; for if the devil can persuade us to omit an exercise once, he will easily bring us to omit it the second time, and more easily still a third, until all our pious practices will, at last, melt away."—*St. Philip.*

"Simplicity, banishes from the soul all that care and anxiety, which many persons find, in seeking a great variety of exercises, and means to attain the love of God. They imagine, that if they do not perform all that is recorded of the saints, they cannot love God. Poor people! they torture their imaginations to discover the art of loving God, and they see not that there is no other art but that of simply loving Him. They suppose that some imaginary flight of prayer is required to attain this object, and simplicity at once possesses it. Simplicity, indeed, embraces the means which are prescribed to each one in his particular vocation to acquire the love of God; but it uses these in such a manner that no other motive stimulates their performance than that love itself; if it were not so, simplicity would be excluded, for this virtue does not admit any motive, however perfect, but the pure love of God."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THE warning which the saints give us against loading ourselves with too many spiritual exercises regards especially the practice of vocal prayer. There is no doubt that vocal prayer, if properly made, is most pleasing to God and profitable to the soul. It was especially by means of vocal prayer that the fathers of the desert rose to such lofty sanctity; and even now this practice does not fail to assist most powerfully many souls to advance in virtue, to overcome temptations, and to attain to the heights of contemplation and mystical union. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that the loading ourselves with an immense number of vocal prayers is frequently

an obstacle rather than a help to perfection. How many are there who began their flight well, but soon grew weak and weary on the wing, and at last discouraged, fell to the earth, pressed down by the excessive burden of their numerous external practices.

Again, as it is contrary to holy simplicity to load oneself excessively with spiritual exercises, so it is against simplicity to wish to adopt all the means which spiritual writers assign as useful for the attainment of perfection, or to practise all those virtuous actions which the saints have performed. For as there are in the church various stations of life, and even amongst those who belong to the same station, there are different dispositions of mind, and drawings of the heart, so there is also a great variety of ways by which God is pleased to lead men to perfection. Wherefore, simplicity requires that we should turn our attention especially to those means and to those acts of virtue which are most suitable to our state of life, most in accordance with our internal dispositions, and with the attractions of Divine grace. "I by no means approve," writes St. Francis of Sales, "of persons spending themselves in desiring a state of life other than that in which they have been placed, and in affecting exercises incompatible with their duties; for by so doing they dissipate their minds, and unfit themselves for their necessary employments. Were I to entertain a desire to embrace the solitude of a Carthusian, I should waste my time, and this desire would occupy the place of that which I ought to cherish, of applying myself with all diligence to the discharge of my actual obligations. I would not even that any one should desire talents

superior to those which have already been given to him, because such a desire would be of no avail, and would only serve to occupy the place of that which he ought to have, of cultivating to the best of his power those which he possesses. Nor would I have any one to desire means of serving God which he has not, but rather make the best use of those which he has. But all this must be understood only of desires which take full possession of the heart; slight and passing wishes cannot do much harm, provided they be not too frequent."

"As to crosses, desire them only in proportion to the patience with which you have hitherto borne those which have been sent you. It is a mere delusion to wish for martyrdom, and yet not have courage sufficient to support a trifling injury. The enemy but too often diverts us from our right path, by raising in us strong desires of what will never take place, to the neglect of present circumstances, from which, however trivial, we might otherwise derive great profit and merit before God. In imagination we enter into combat with the monsters of Africa, while, for want of attention, we allow ourselves to be mortally stung by every little reptile that crosses our path. Neither ought you to desire temptations, for this would be rashness; rather prepare your soul to resist temptations when they shall attack you."

"A variety of meats, taken in considerable quantity, always overcharges the stomach, and if it be weak, ruins it. Fill not the soul, then, with a multitude of spiritual desires, for these would incumber the soul; nor with worldly desires, for these would ruin it. When the soul has been well purified from evil inclinations, it feels a great

avidity for spiritual things, and longs after numberless exercises of piety, mortification, penance, humility, charity, and prayer. Such spiritual hunger is a good sign, but it will be well for you, like a convalescent invalid, to consider whether you can digest all that your appetite demands. Regulate your desires by the advice of your spiritual director, and follow those only which he approves of for the present, and then, God will inspire you with such others, at some future time, as shall be necessary for your advancement. I do not say that any really good desires should be entirely abandoned, but only that they should be well regulated; that is, that such as would be out of place at present should be put aside from the heart, and only those be entertained which circumstances warrant."

There is, however, one thing to which all the elect of God must always aim with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind; and this is the love of God—the most pure and most fervent love of God. Divine love is the best master we can have in the spiritual life; it will teach us the best means of perfection; it will smooth the way for us by making things easy and sweet; it will itself supply the place of all other virtues; for Divine love is an infinite treasure, an inexhaustible source of spiritual riches. "As the queen bee," says again St. Francis of Sales, "never moves from place to place without the attendance of all her little subjects; so charity never comes to reside in the soul but in company with all the other virtues, which she rules and governs as a queen rules her subjects. She does not, however, employ them all at once, nor all continually, or in all circumstances. 'The just

man,' says holy David, 'is like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season.'(a) That is, the soul, watered by the streams of charity, shall produce virtuous actions, each in its proper time and circumstances."

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"Simplicity does not interfere with what others do, or may do; it attends to itself: and even in this it limits its care to those things which are necessary. As to the concerns of other persons, it dwells upon them as little as possible. This virtue has a close affinity to humility, which permits us to entertain a bad opinion of no one but ourselves."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"Thou wilt never be internal and devout, if thou dost not pass over in silence other men's concerns, and particularly look to thyself. If thou attend wholly to thyself and to God, thou wilt be little moved with what thou perceivest without thee. Where art thou when thou art not present to thyself? And when thou hast run over all things, what profit will it be to thee, if thou hast neglected thyself? If thou desirest to have peace and true union, thou must set all the rest aside, and turn thy eyes upon thyself alone.

"Have always an eye upon thyself in the first place, and take special care to admonish thyself rather than thy dearest friends. We might have much peace, if we would not busy ourselves with the sayings and doings of others, and with things that belong not to us. How can he long remain in peace, who entangles himself with other people's cares; who seeks occasions abroad, and who is little or seldom inwardly recollected? Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall enjoy much peace."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

MAN is created for the single end of loving God, and saving his immortal soul. "This is the will

(a) Psalm i. 3.

of God," says the Apostle St. Paul, "your own santification." This is the great object of our creation; and, besides this, all other things are nothing but vanity of vanities.

Deeply impressed with this sublime principle, the saints were ever watchful over themselves, and laboured with the greatest care to purify their hearts from sin, and to adorn their souls with Christian virtues. As regards other persons, they interfered as little as possible with their concerns; and when either necessity or charity required their co-operation, they gave it always subordinately to their own sanctification, and in the spirit of humility and divine love.

On this principle the Apostle St. Paul exhorts Timothy to attend to himself and to doctrine. Likewise St. Bernard, writing to Eugenius the Pope, tells him that he must strive to make all considerations begin from himself, lest, neglecting himself, he should spend all his energies and labours uselessly upon others.

Oh! how sadly deluded are those persons who make it their chief business to scrutinize the conduct of others, to inquire into their actions, and interfere with what does not belong to them; whilst they forget their own interior, and neglect to put the motions of their own hearts in order.

When the great St. Anthony retired into the desert, that he might lead a perfect life, he applied himself with great earnestness and diligence to the sole cultivation of his own interior; and in this study he constantly persevered to the end. Far from indulging any vain or idle curiosity in his communication with the other religious, or uselessly meddling with their concerns, he simply considered with attention in what virtue each of

them excelled, and strove to the utmost of his power to copy their virtues in himself. It was a saying of his, that as the bee settles upon every flower, and extracts from it its most pure and exquisite substance, to make honey, so a religious ought to learn from his companions what is commendable in them; from one modesty, from another silence, from a third fervour, from a fourth obedience and resignation. When St. Jerome advised men to live in community rather than in solitude, it was, as he said, "to the end that they might learn humility from one, and patience from another; that one should teach us silence, and another meekness and docility." This spirit of holy simplicity, by which a person attends seriously to his own sanctification, without interfering, unless duty or charity requires it, with the doings of others, was most conspicuous in the Blessed Leonard, of whom it is recorded, that when he appeared in public he was sometimes so abstracted in mind and so absorbed in God, that he did not notice anything that passed, nor even know the road he was going. He never recognised the monks in the convent, whom he met daily, but passed them with his eyes cast down, so absorbed and recollected, that they were quite edified at the sight of him, and touched with interior compunction. To keep a guard upon his ears, he avoided all useless conversations. If it happened that a useless topic was ever introduced in his presence, he, in the most gentle manner, changed it for profitable conversation, or turned his back and walked away. Greater still was his care in the custody of his tongue: he never uttered a word that did not tend to the glory of God, or to promote the good of his neighbour. He used to say, "The

tongue is the pulse of the heart, and to know the mind of a religious, it is sufficient to converse with him; if his conversation turns on holy things, it is a sign that his heart is with God; but, if otherwise, and he is given to levity and foolish talking, he is nothing more than a hollow reed." This was his maxim, which he inviolably observed: "I will not lose time in idle talking, and never speak but from necessity or charity." He rarely spoke, and lived retired—solitary in his cell, which he never left but in the service of God and his neighbour.

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"Discover not thy heart to every one, but treat of thy affairs with a man that is wise and feareth God."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"If we have a desire to make any considerable progress in virtue, and to arrive at perfection, we ought to keep nothing hid from our superiors, because, by an entire manifestation of ourselves, they will be able to confirm us in what is good, and will suggest convenient remedies against what is bad; and so, by means of this reciprocal communication, we shall by little and little attain perfection."—*St. Basil.*

THE saints adduce various reasons to show the necessity of our dealing with openness and candour with our superiors, if we sincerely wish to advance in the path of virtue and to become perfect.

One reason is, because by this means our superiors will be better able to instruct us in the science of salvation, and to direct us in the path of holiness and justice. "We see," says Cassian,

" that human sciences, which have only temporal advantages as their object, and in which nothing but sensible and palpable things are treated of, can never be well understood till we put ourselves under some master to learn them. How then can any one imagine that there is no necessity of a master in the science of salvation and of Christian perfection, since it is, moreover, so hidden and spiritual a science, that the means of obtaining it are not exposed to corporal eyes, and even those of our soul cannot discover them without great purity. In other sciences we risk only some temporal advantage if we do not succeed, and it may be easily rapaired; but here salvation or damnation depends upon our good or bad success. Here we are not to fight against visible but invisible enemies—not against one or two, but against legions of devils, who cease neither day or night to make war upon us. And hence we cannot do better than to have recourse to our ghostly fathers, by discovering to them whatever passes in our souls, that they may assist and conduct us by their counsels."

Another reason is, because by being open and candid with our superiors, it will be more easy for them to know the wounds of our souls, and to cure them by applying the proper remedies. Our superior is not only our master appointed by God to teach us, but also our spiritual physician, whose office it is to guard us from the infection of sin, and heal our spiritual maladies. But how shall he be able to do this if he does not know us, and if we do not discover ourselves to him. " He that hides his crimes," says the wise man, " can never be well directed." " A sick man can never be cured if he discovers

not his disease to his physician, for the physician," says St. Jerome, "cures not that which he does not know." We must, therefore, entirely discover our spiritual sickness to our directors or superiors, if we wish to be cured.

It must also be observed, that the more perfect knowledge superiors have of the interior of their subjects, the more they will be able to preserve them from the inconveniences to which they may be exposed. Thus, through a concealment of their temptations, inclinations, and weakness, they might be placed in certain offices, and engaged in employments, unsuited to their strength. Wherefore it imports very much, that subjects, especially religious, for the proper discharge of their duties, and for greater security to their conscience, should discover their whole interior to their superiors, otherwise they will render themselves answerable for all the misfortunes that may befal them; since, had they made known their weakness, as they ought to have done, and their want of spiritual strength, superiors would have taken care not to expose them to occasions of danger. "The poor," says Plutarch, "who wish to appear rich, soon make themselves poorer than they were, and in a short time bring about their entire ruin; for, through their wish to imitate rich persons, they incur greater expenses than their state can bear." We may say the same of those that are poor in virtue, and have not a great stock of humility. If a religious who is in this condition should hide his poverty, and pass himself off for being rich in spiritual things, he will become still more poor, and, perhaps, will bring on himself utter ruin; because his superiors may treat him as a man filled with the treasures

of grace, and thus expose him to dangerous occasions, for which he has not a sufficient amount of virtue.

It is recorded by Cassian, that one day, when St. Anthony was in conference with other holy fathers of the desert, they held a disputation upon what conduced most to perfection. One said it was chastity, because chastity kept sensuality subject to reason; another said it was justice; and so on: every one gave his opinion of what he thought best. When St. Anthony had heard them all, he decided the question, by telling them that there were two virtues most necessary to acquire perfection, which were, discretion and prudence; and that actions which discretion and prudence do not regulate, are not properly acts of virtue, and cannot be pleasing to God. "Now, would you know," continues Cassian, "a short and easy means to acquire these virtues? Open all your thoughts to your superior, and guide yourself in all things by his advice: by this means, his discretion and prudence will become yours." St. Bernard affirms this in express terms: "Because the spirit of discretion," says he, "is a thing rarely found in the world, therefore, make obedience supply in you, the defect of this virtue; if you do nothing either small or great but what is commanded you, nor after any other manner than you are commanded to perform it, you will supply the want of experience."

St. Teresa thus speaks of herself: "I have always endeavoured, to treat in truth and sincerity with those, to whom I committed the care of my soul. I also wished to make known to them even the first motions of my heart; and as regards those things which might in any way be doubtful

or suspicious, I was wont to discuss them against myself with strong reasons: then I laid open my soul without any disguise or duplicity."

The venerable M. Alacoque, writing to a person who did not use candour and sincerity in dealing with her director, speaks to her as follows: "This want of simplicity gives great power to the enemy, for he is strong enough if we keep his secret: but nothing so much confounds him, or renders him so powerless against us, as the sincere accusation of our faults; simply manifesting our good and evil to those who guide us, without exaggeration or dissimulation, that they may know us in order to conduct us to the perfection which God demands of us; listening with humility and submission to what they tell us, and accomplishing it with simplicity, whatever it may be; provided it be not offensive to God. See, my beloved sister, what has arisen in my mind to say to you at present; I do not know why God has permitted me to speak to you of this holy virtue of simplicity, unless it be that I feel so much horror of the contrary vice, that if I should discover in a soul all the other virtues without that of sincerity, all, I say, would seem to me to be only deceits and illusions."

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"Blessed is he that findeth a true friend." (a) "A faithful friend is a strong defence, and he that hath found him hath found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the medicine of life, and they that fear the Lord shall find him." (b)—*The Wise Man.*

"We must always follow the footsteps of the elders with the greatest caution, and we must reveal to them whatever arises in our hearts, without concealing anything under the cover of shame."—*Holy Abbot Moses.*

CASSIAN says that the first thing the ancient Fathers proposed to those who began to serve God, was, that they should take great care presently to discover to their superiors whatsoever temptations they had. This, says he, these men of God looked upon as a kind of first principle amongst them, and as the basis and foundation of the whole spiritual building. "A religious," says the great St. Anthony, "should not, if possible, make one step or drink one drop of water in his cell, without immediately declaring it to his superior, that there may be no irregularity even in his least actions, but that all things may be rectified by the spirit of obedience." St. John Climacus says, that he found, in a very regular and holy monastery, several religious who carried a little book at their girdle, in which they daily wrote whatever passed within them, to give an account of it to their superior, who had obliged them thereunto. St. Basil, St. Jerom, St. Am-

(a) Eccles. xxv. 12. (b) Eccles. vi. 16.

brose, and St. Bernard expressly prescribe a similar practice.

The reason why the saints insist so strongly upon the point, that all suggestions of the devil and temptations of any consequence ought to be discovered to superiors, is thus alleged by Cassian; namely, because "the devil cannot deceive us by his craft, if we have recourse quickly to the experience and wisdom of our spiritual father, and guide ourselves by his knowledge; for then he will not have to contend with a new and inexperienced, but with an old soldier, one well skilled in the spiritual warfare; because, whatever experience or ability our spiritual father has, he communicates it to us as soon as we entirely subject ourselves to his direction. Thus we gain the true spirit of discretion and prudence, on which St. Anthony set so high a value. It is for this reason that the devil, who desires nothing more than to destroy us, hinders us as much as he can from declaring our temptations to superiors." St. Dorotheus says, that nothing pleases the devil more than to meet with one that will not discover his temptations; for then, since he fights with him hand to hand, he is sure of the victory, according to the words of Scripture:— "Woe to him who is alone; because, if he comes to fall, there is no one to help him up." (a) On the contrary, adds the saint, there is nothing the devil fears so much, and which gives him so much pain, as to see himself discovered. For then he loses all courage and all hopes of gaining the victory, and therefore betakes himself to flight. St. Dorotheus relates, on this head, what hap-

(a) Eccles. iv. 10.

pened to St. Macarius, and which helps much to our purpose. He says that this saint, who had been a disciple of the great St. Anthony, and to whom God had given a great power over the spirits of darkness, asked a devil one day what success he had with the hermits? The devil answered, that he succeeded very ill, because he could suggest nothing to them but they presently discovered it to their superior. "But there is, notwithstanding, one of your brethren," added he, "who is very much my friend, and with whom I am well pleased;" and being hereupon constrained to it by the power of God, he declared the hermit's name. St. Macarius went presently to find him out, and perceiving from the conversation he had with him that he did not discover his temptations to his ghostly father, and that he made himself his own guide, exhorted him to do so no more for the future, and not to confide hereafter to his own judgment. The hermit received this advice with very great submission, and profited so well by it, that a little while after, the saint asking the devil how it went with his friend the hermit? "He is no longer my friend," said he, in a rage; "he is become my mortal enemy." "And here it is to be observed," says St. Dorotheus, "that all the hermits who lived under St. Macarius were tempted; but, because they took care to give an account of all their temptations to their spiritual father, and governed themselves by his advice, the devil tempted them in vain, for he could effect nothing against any of them, but only against him who, relying upon his own judgment, would not discover his interior to his ghostly father; and yet as soon as he did so, the devil had no more power over him."

Hence St. Alfonsus Liguori left the following advice for his religious: "During the temptation, my dear brethren, never take a resolution, whatever the case may be, but go instantly and discover it to the superior. When the temptation is upon us, we do not recognise that it comes from the devil. He conceals himself under a veil, and puts before our eyes treacherous spectacles, making us see things not as they are in themselves, but according to our own passions. If we would avoid the snare, we should instantly recommend ourselves to God, and abandon ourselves into His hands. This is difficult in time of temptation—very difficult indeed; and, for this reason, when we are calm, we ought incessantly to offer ourselves to God in prayer, and throw ourselves blindly into His arms. The strongest temptations can never shake a soul that offers herself entirely to God."

NINETEENTH DAY.

"If thou seest a prudent man, have recourse to him, and let thy feet wear out the steps of his door." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Treat with your director in all sincerity and candour, clearly manifesting to him both good and evil, without pretence or dissimulation; and then what is good in you will be examined and encouraged, and what is evil will be remedied and corrected; you will be comforted and fortified in affliction, regulated and moderated in consolation. Place in him the greatest confidence, but tempered with holy reverence; so that your reverence may not diminish confidence, or confidence prevent reverence. Confide in him with the respect of a daughter towards her father; respect him with the confidence of a son towards his mother; in a word, let your friendship for him be strong and affectionate, but all holy and sacred, entirely divine and spiritual."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

Openness and candour in dealing with directors and superiors, besides being a great help for advancing in virtue and overcoming temptations, is also a source of much comfort and spiritual consolation. One of the means pointed out by moral philosophers for finding comfort in affliction, is to discover our sorrow to some person. St. Thomas proposes this when speaking of sadness, and the reason he gives for it, is, that when we wish to keep all our grief within ourselves, it draws our attention more violently to it, and thereby the sense of our grief becomes more lively; whereas, when we discover it, it grows less, because then our attention is divided and our heart is eased by dilating itself. Experience daily teaches us this truth, for do we not daily meet with people who tell us they find ease, in relating

(a) Eccles. vi. 36.

their afflictions? The holy Abbot Nilus, disciple of St. Chrysostom, says that this remedy was very much in use amongst the ancient Fathers, who, the better to authorise the practice, made use of the following comparison. "Have you not taken notice," say they, "that when the clouds are full of water, they are black and obscure; but the more water falls from them, and the more they discharge themselves, the clearer also they become? The same also is true in the disquiets of mind and temptations of a religious. The more he keeps them to himself, the more thoughtful, troubled, and melancholy he is. But when he frees himself from them, by discovering them to his superior, he feels, according to the measure that he discovers them, the black vapours of sadness and disquiet dissipated; and freeing himself from that which put him into so melancholy a humour, he resumes his former joy and tranquillity."

St. Dorotheus relates of himself, that when he had given an account of his soul to his ghostly father, he felt such peace of mind that sometimes he was afraid it was a bad sign, "because," as the Scripture says, "we must enter Heaven by many tribulations;" and finding nothing but joy and sweetness, he feared that he had reason to doubt whether he was in the right way to Heaven. But he was relieved from his anxiety by the abbot John, whom he consulted in this affair, and who told him that the peace and interior satisfaction he enjoyed was promised to those that hide nothing from their ghostly father.

This means of securing peace and interior satisfaction is a very great comfort to those who are called to the exercise of offices of charity by their

superiors. A religious, who has discovered all his imperfections and infirmities to his superior, and is afterwards sent on some mission, or charged with some employment, ought to maintain great quiet and repose of mind, and have a great confidence that God will happily extricate him from all the dangers he may meet with. "I did not put myself, O Lord," may he say, "into this office, or into this employment; I represented my own incapacity and little spiritual strength to acquit myself in it as I should do. You deigned yourself to place me in it, and you must, therefore, supply what is wanting in me to secure success." With what a plenitude of confidence may he use these words of St. Austin: "Strengthen me, O Lord, to perform what thou commandest, and command me what Thou wilt."

It is with candour and sincerity in dealing with our superiors, as with the declaration of our sins in confession. When, out of shame, we dare not accuse ourselves of some sin, we feel no peace within ourselves, and are in continual disquiet and anguish of heart; but as soon as we have confessed the sin, we presently find ourselves content and at ease—we seem as if we had cast off a heavy burden, under which we were ready to fall. "Wounds which are not open," says St. Gregory, "cause greater pain than others, by reason of the inflammation produced by the matter that is within; but as soon as they are opened, the matter and corruption is discharged, and the pain diminishes." The accusing ourselves of our sins, or declaring our temptations and weaknesses, produces almost the same effects; "for what else is confession of sins but the opening of a wound or imposthume?"

TWENTIETH DAY.

"Be ye prudent as serpents, and simple as doves." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"Some imagine that simplicity is contrary to prudence, and that these two virtues are antagonistic to each other. This is by no means true; virtues are never opposed one to another, but are very closely connected. The virtue of simplicity is opposed to the vice of cunning, which is the source of subtlety, artifice, and duplicity."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

Although this saint had a kind of predilection for holy simplicity, yet he did not fail to recommend to pious souls the practice of holy prudence as a very useful means for advancing in perfection. Once, speaking to his spiritual daughters, the nuns of the Visitation, he thus addressed them: "The true virtue of prudence ought to be carefully practised, as it is that spiritual salt which gives a zest and flavour to every other virtue. But it must be cherished by the daughters of the Visitation, in subordination to the virtue of simple confidence in God: for the sisters are ever to be animated with such simplicity of confidence as may induce them to remain in repose in the arms of their heavenly Father, and of their dear mother, our Blessed Lady."

It is related in the life of St. Jane Frances of Chantal, that when once a sister was praising simplicity by speaking against prudence, the saint said to her: "You must make a distinction, then, and speak of human prudence; for our holy mother the Church bids us ask God to teach us

(a) Matt. x. 16.

the ways of His prudence." Once, writing to one of the superiors, she said to her: "In a word, my dear daughter, good superioresses of Mary must be prudent doves, so as to know how to mix one ounce of prudence with ten pounds of simplicity. The virtues are a chain of honour, of which prudence is one of the links, and if it be taken away, the chain is then broken." She also said: "Many blame prudence indiscreetly, and many practise it immoderately: both do wrong." What she recommended to others she was most careful to practise herself; so that her manner of governing, whilst on one side it breathed an admirable simplicity, on the other was accompanied with great wisdom and prudence. She anticipated the wants of her subjects with charity, listened to them with patience, spoke to them with sweetness, and assisted them with humble perseverance. "We should not," she was wont to say, "put those who are at all cowardly, all at once in the front of the army, lest they should be discouraged; nor show them all their wounds, lest they should believe them incurable; but we should sweetly teach them to walk, as did the great apostle, who acted like a tender nurse amongst his children." Writing to a newly-elected superioress, she gave her the following advice: "Your office, my very dear daughter, is that of a mother of a family. Apply yourself with a holy zeal to the care of your household, which requires from you a twofold vigilance, temporal and spiritual. Let your government, as regards the former, be generous and humble, neither niggardly nor splendid; take care that your house be not involved in debt, for this gives great anxiety and just subject of complaint to

successors; if you are poor, go on in sweetness and humility. As to spiritual affairs, let your vigilance be continual, yet sweet. Make your subjects as devout as you possibly can, for on this their real good depends; since, if they take pleasure in conversing with God, they will be very retired and mortified. Be not like those mothers who dare not punish their children, nor, on the other hand, like those impetuous ones, who are ever making them cry. Do not flatter self-love, and induce your daughters to abandon themselves to your guidance. You must know, my very dear daughter, that your sisters will not all make the same flight towards perfection; some will soar very high, others will fly very low, others again will take a middle course: serve each one according to her capacity. There are certain good but little souls, of whom one must not expect more than to see them go on their little way in the path of perfection without pressing them, for that would only make them fall, and embarrass them with bitterness and disgust; others have great energies, and these you must urge on to the true virtue of humility and divestment of self, but with sweetness and great constancy, and you must not spare them. If your government be praised, humble yourself before God, duly referring the glory to Him alone; if you be blamed, humble yourself with the knowledge that nothing can produce nothing; ever bear this in mind, as a certain truth, my dear daughter, that if you are humble, sweet, generous, and devout, you will do great things by the grace of God."

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"Prudence must precede every action which we undertake; for, if prudence be wanting, there is nothing, however good it may seem, which is not turned into evil."—*St. Basil.*

"The virtue of prudence is indispensably necessary, to teach us how to adapt ourselves to the state and disposition of each person with whom we have to do; to make us circumspect in word and in action; and to restrain us from all that may be prejudicial to our neighbour. It is the function of prudence to regulate our words and actions. Prudence prompts us to speak with due caution, so as to suit our discourse to the time, place, and subject. It causes us to abstain from such arguments as offend God or our neighbour, as well as from those which tend to our own praise, or such other evil consequences. It makes us proceed with consideration and with a right intention in action, so that the prudent man does everything in the manner, at the time, and for the end it ought to be done, such end being nothing but God Himself. It teaches us to make choice of the most proper means, and puts us in the most direct and sure way to obtain our last end."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

This saint combined simplicity with prudence so well, that up to the time of his death he was looked upon as the wisest man of his age. It was the high and just esteem in which his prudence was held, that induced St. Francis of Sales to make him accept the office of superior of his first convent in Paris; Ann of Austria, to place him at the head of her council; the president of the parliament, to consult him as a "man of superior mind, not only in matters of conscience, but also in secular affairs." And besides the opinions of individuals, there are many public facts which speak loudly in praise of his prudence. Such are the great establishments which he formed; the means he adopted

for their success, the wise regulations which he gave them; the manner in which he appeased the Bishop of Mans;—in a word, whoever examines his conduct, not only in France but in all Europe, is obliged to acknowledge that Vincent of Paul conducted himself in everything with the greatest prudence and wisdom.

The prudence of St. Ignatius in dealing with his neighbours, and in adopting the best means in order to draw them to God, was really wonderful. With men of the world he did not at first speak of spiritual things, which would be like offering them a naked hook without any bait upon it; but he, with great prudence, turned their minds inwards on themselves, and spoke of their own affairs. To the merchant, he would speak of commerce; to the soldier, of war; to the statesman, of politics, and the like. Then, in the course of time, he would turn to higher subjects, and speak of a very different traffic, of another warfare, and the affairs of another kingdom, of gaining heaven, of the combat with vices, and the subjugation of passions.

But with such as paid him frequent visits of idleness he adopted a different method, and, without waiting an opportunity, he began conversing on death, judgment, hell, and other fearful truths, so that they might either profit by his discourse, or cease to occupy his time.

The saint used to say to his religious: "We should make use of the same arts for gaining souls that the devil does for destroying them. First of all, he searches out sagaciously what are the natural dispositions and inclinations of each, and then prepares the appropriate seductive bait, offering wealth to the miser, honour to

the ambitious, luxuries to the effeminate, and things which have the semblance of piety to the devout. Moreover, he proceeds quietly and gradually, being content to have little at first, expecting to have the whole by-and-by. In like manner, we ought in all things honest to follow the natural dispositions of men, and conceal many things, till their minds are subdued to Christ; moreover, we ought to attack them by the way which their own inclinations open to us."

The saint used great caution and moderation, not only with strangers, but also with his own subjects, whom he treated with much prudence, according to their various dispositions and abilities. "When the saint sent me to govern the new college at Loretto," says Father Oliviero, "he gave me hardly any instructions how I was to conduct myself towards the governor of the town, the canons, and others. I inquired what rule I was to observe, because the rules of the college could not be acted on there, on account of the holiness of the place, and the great concourse of pilgrims: and in like manner it would be very difficult to observe the rules of the professed house. He answered: 'Oliviero, do as you think best, and as God inspires you. See, and adapt the rules to the place as you best can.' I asked, what offices I should assign to the different subjects he committed to me. He answered briefly: 'Cut according to the quantity of your bread; only inform me of all your arrangements.'"

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"The prudence of the flesh is death; but the prudence of the spirit is life and peace." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"There are two sorts of prudence, the one human, the other Christian. Human, carnal, or worldly prudence, is that which has only temporal prosperity in view, and is indifferent about the means, provided it attains its object. Christian prudence takes Eternal Incarnate Wisdom for its guide in every thought, word, and work. It is regulated in every emergency, not by fatuous glimmering lights of its own, or by worldly judgment, but by the maxims of faith."

"True Christian prudence leads us to submit our understanding to the maxims of the Gospel without fear of erring; it makes us judge of things in the same manner as Christ himself judged of them, and speak and act as He spoke and acted. This holy prudence tends to a purely Divine end, and teaches us also to embrace means proportioned to it."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

St. Francis of Sales was a sworn enemy to human prudence. In a letter to one of his penitents he writes thus: "Had I to begin life over again with my present feelings, nobody, I believe, could shake my conviction, that the prudence of the flesh and of the children of this world is truly chimerical and foolish." St. Vincent of Paul made use of no other prudence than that which he calls Christian. Though naturally of an acute and penetrating intellect, he did not rely upon his own judgment until he had confronted it with our Saviour's maxims—the only safe and judicious rule. He never commenced any important affair, whether in answering or advising others, without having in view some word or deed of Christ, upon whom he placed his reliance. On its being pro-

(a) Rom. viii. 8.

posed, in an assembly or conference of priests, founded and directed by him, for missions occasionally given in the country, to give one in the suburbs of Paris; it was objected by some, that their plain and simple sermons, though beneficial to rustics, would be laughable to a more cultivated audience near the capital. But St. Vincent contended that they ought to continue the same simple method, and that the spirit of the world, which reigned in that quarter of Paris, would be better overcome by an attack from Christ's spirit of simplicity. He added, that, in conformity to the spirit of Christ, they should not seek their own glory, but that of their heavenly Father, and that they should be ready to incur contempt, contradiction, and persecution, if such were the will of God. That by imitating Christ's simple speech, they would at least be sure Jesus was speaking in the midst of them; and that from this they might become instruments of that Divine mercy which penetrates the hardest hearts, and converts the most rebellious minds. The holy counsels were received as coming from an angel, and laying aside all human respects, they gave the mission as desired, which produced much fruit.

One of his congregation having signified to him in a letter that it would have been well to begin the preaching of missions amongst persons of rank and influence, the saint replied: "Yours seems to me a human design, and contrary to Christian simplicity. God forbid we should do anything for ends so low. The Divine goodness requires of us that we never do good for the sake of being esteemed, but that all our actions be directed to God alone." And to the superior of

a newly-founded house, who wished to begin the course of exercises by preaching a mission, in a way to attract much attention, he gave this answer: "Lowly and obscure beginnings seem distasteful to everybody; and all seem to wish to make some good appearance by a splendid mission, which might show what the congregation can do. God keep you from entering into such desires as these. What becomes our profession and the spirit of Christianity? which is to avoid such display, to hide ourselves, and to seek contempt and confusion, like Jesus Christ. If we are thus like Him, we shall have Him for a companion in our labours.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom, and is rich in prudence. The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and her fruit than the chiefest and purest gold. She is more precious than all riches; and all the things that are desired are not to be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and glory. Her ways are beautiful ways, and all her paths are peaceable. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and he that shall retain her is blessed." ([a])—*The Wise Man.*

"One of the most excellent means of obtaining perseverance is discretion. We must not wish to do everything at once, or become saints in four days."—*St. Philip.*

This holy discretion, which is at once so commendable in the sight of God, and so profitable

([a]) Prov. iii. 13—18.

for the attainment of perfection, was a peculiar characteristic of St. Ignatius of Loyola. This appears especially in the manner in which he governed his religious,—he was very careful not to burthen any one beyond the degree of his spiritual strength. To those who were strong and exercised in virtue, he allotted laborious undertakings, painful and difficult journeys, which exposed them to poverty, suffering, and persecution; but to the weak, who were generally novices, he gave tasks proportioned to their powers, that they might be willing to make greater efforts, instead of being discouraged. Thus, for instance, when Brother Bernard of Japan was sent to Europe by St. Francis Xavier, as he was a novice both in the faith and in the society, he refused to give him any difficult duties to perform, though he earnestly entreated for them, except upon condition, that directly he experienced any weariness or disgust of mind, he should inform him of it. So, also, in the administration of punishment, he paid great attention to the disposition of his subjects. Very often his only correction to the gentle was that which Christ gave to St. Peter—one look of reproach: and very often his words were rather expressions of praise than admonitions. Thus, to a novice who made too free a use of his eyes, he said: "Brother Giovan Dominico, why do you not join modesty of looks, with that modesty which God has given to your soul?" On the other hand, he imposed a very severe penance upon Father Oliviero, for a very slight fault of the same kind, because he was a man who had grown old in religion, and was of distinguished virtue.

The novices, especially at their first entrance into the society, he treated as tender plants, and exacted little from them. A certain youth entered the society, who had when in the world been rich, and brought with him a very valuable crucifix, with the Madonna standing at the foot of the cross. The saint, perceiving that the novice prized this crucifix, both as a work of art and for devotional motives, left him in possession of it, without showing him that such a precious object was incongruous with his religious poverty; but very soon the novice made such advances in perfection, and especially in mortification and contempt of self, that he surpassed not only his equals, but some of his elders in religion. Then the saint said: "Now that this young man has got the crucifix in his heart, it is time to take it out of his hands." He accordingly took it from him, and the youth felt pleasure rather than regret in losing it. In like manner, when men, illustrious either for station, birth, or learning, joined the society, he used to treat them with great respect, and call them by the titles they had borne in the world, till he was satisfied of their growth in virtue, or till they begged themselves, from feelings of shame, to be treated like the rest. For this only he waited, and no sooner did he perceive that they were able to bear it, than he subjected them to the same humiliations as the others.

A most wise and zealous missionary thus wrote to a person who was anxious to attain all at once the heights of perfection: "My dear sister, I must repeat to you what I have already said at other times, that perfection is the result of possessing all Christian virtues; and that virtues

are habits, and habits cannot be acquired in a few days or weeks; that we cannot expect, consequently, to become good in a few days or months. You may recollect that when you were at school, you did not acquire the habit of playing on the pianoforte, or of singing, or of any work, in a few days; and that sometimes you thought, perhaps, that you could never succeed in learning several things, which afterwards you did learn. Now, I must tell you, that it is much more difficult to learn how to practise humility, patience, charity, &c., than to learn any art or science: so have patience with yourself. To wish to become good all at once, in order to redeem the lost time, would be the same as to pretend to learn a language in a few days, because one has been negligent in his lessons for several months or years. You say, that since you saw me you have done '*no good at all;*' but I say, first, that we do a great deal of good *without knowing it;* and, secondly, that if you have not fallen into mortal sin, you have done a great good indeed; and if you have not fallen into voluntary venial sins, or but into a few of them, you have done a *greater good*, even, because it is really a great good not to offend the *Infinite Good.* However, to feel so unhappy, because you do not do all things that you imagine Almighty God desires you should do, is a temptation, and a little self-love. I say you imagine this, because, for instance, I do not allow, that Almighty God wishes you should *always* eat what you *like least.* To do so might be a great indiscretion in a married lady, not to say that such a practice may gradually spoil your appetite and stomach, and so ruin your health. That sometimes you

'should mortify yourself in such a way is very commendable, but I must decidedly forbid you to do so always. Thus you see, that your grief has no ground; and so, likewise, the fear that all this will be for your greater condemnation. 'Do not believe,' says the Holy Ghost, 'every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are from God.' It is one of the arts of the enemy to make people believe many desires, which we cannot accomplish, are from God, in order to disturb our minds, and discourage us altogether from the Divine service."

In another letter he writes to her as follows: "The habit of any virtue cannot be acquired but by many and many acts; hence, we are not to think that we may become saints by merely resolving to become such. And if, because after a few days we find that we cannot keep our resolutions, we should conclude that we shall never be able to do so, we should be as wrong in our conclusions as if we should say that we shall never be able to become professors of music, because, after a few days that we have begun to play or to sing, we cannot succeed in playing or singing like the best professors. Consider how "the earth bringeth forth fruit: first the blade, then the ear; afterwards the full corn in the ear;" from which you will see, first, that things must grow in the soul gradually,—first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear; and secondly, that there is a growth which we do not know, and which cannot be perceived till after many years. Now you would not be inclined to say, that the full corn shall never be in the ear because it is not to be found in the blade. Again; Christ says, in the parable of the seed which is cast into the good

ground, that they who are figured by this last shall bear fruit, not at once but in patience. Have patience, then; you must have your 'sleep' and your 'rising,' and in time fruit shall be found in abundance.

"I insist always upon one point, because I know that the enemy discourages many by this *very impatience to do every thing at once.*"

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"Discretion gives order to every virtue; and order gives method, beauty, and perpetuity. Discretion, therefore, is not so much a virtue as a certain tutor and guide of virtues—a ruler of the affections, and the teacher of manners. Take away discretion, and virtue becomes vice."—*St. Bernard.*

"The measure of penance cannot be the same for all persons, or for the same persons at all times; for, on the one hand, care must be taken lest the body become rebellious from over-delicacy; and, on the other, lest it become unfitted for working in God's service, through excess of austerity."

"Penances ought to be accommodated to the spiritual strength of the penitent; otherwise, and particularly when they produce illness, they alarm and fatigue a weak virtue; and then, instead of being moderated, they are abandoned altogether."—*St. Ignatius.*

This is generally confirmed by the saints, but especially by those who were more experienced in the religious life, or in the direction of souls. "The maceration of our body," writes St. Thomas, "by watching, fasting, and the like, is only acceptable to God as far as it is an act of virtue; and it cannot be an act of virtue unless it be done

with due discretion, so that, whilst we check sensual lust, the body must not be too much depressed." St. Bernard, experiencing the bad effects of the excessive austerities which he had practised in his youth, grieved and blamed himself severely for having weakened his body too much by fasting and watching; and, enlightened by his own experience, he used to caution his religious against the same fault. "How often," says he, "has the devil suggested excessive watching to some brethren, in order that they might fall asleep, and be inattentive in time of the most sacred functions. How often has he led them to prolong their fasts beyond bounds, in order to stupify them, and thus render them unfit for the Divine service. How often has he urged them to excessive corporal labour, without discretion, that, breaking their strength, he might make them incapable of following the common rule, and of observing the ordinary practices of the community. . . . . You well know how some who, at first, could not be checked in their fervour, having begun in the spirit, have ended in the flesh; and how they have now made a most shameful alliance with their bodies, who before waged a cruel war against them."

St. Jerome speaks in the same way: "I have known," says he, "persons, of both sexes, who, through excessive abstinence, grievously injured their mind, especially amongst those who dwelt in damp and cold cells; such persons have become so bewildered as not to know how to rule themselves in their words and actions." Wherefore St. Basil, the great master of the Oriental monks, gives the following rule: "Confirm rather than enfeeble the bodily strength; render the

body vigorous and fit for good works, by prudent discretion rather than exhaust it by extreme maceration."

St. Teresa, in her letter to the Bishop of Osma, speaking of herself in the third person, writes thus: "As far as regards her body and health, I thinks she takes more care of it; neither has she such desires of doing penance as she used to have; but, in her opinion, all tends to this object, namely, to be able to serve God the more in other things; for she often offers Him, as an agreeable sacrifice, this care she takes of the body."

When St. Ignatius was asked by Father Natale what he thought of the hermit called Antonio Majorica, who led an excessively austere life, he replied: "Before three years are over he will abandon his solitude and his penance." And so it proved, for St. Ignatius had discovered, from a long discussion with the hermit, that his inward virtue did not equal the external rigour of his life.

The blessed Paul of the Cross, although himself a very mortified man, and a promoter of corporal mortification amongst his children, was most anxious that they should practise it with such discretion and prudence as not to impair their constitutions nor destroy their strength. "O, how necessary," says he, speaking to superiors, "is vigilance, that the young men may keep up their strength; otherwise we should have an hospital, and few would persevere. I know that you are cautious in forbidding the little chains and other penances beyond the rule; and I know practically your charity, prudence, and discretion. Do not be surprised that I speak so much of this, for God makes me feel it much; and I assure you that by keeping up the strength,

of the young especially, the rules are better observed."

When St. Francis of Assisium had assembled his religious in the first general chapter of his order, he found that many of them were in the habit of practising extraordinary mortifications, which either shortened their days or rendered them useless to the order by the illnesses which were the consequence. He, therefore, publicly forbade them, by the virtue of holy obedience, to make use of them; and ordered all who had coats of mail, iron girdles, or other instruments of mortification, to leave them off, and deliver them up to him. This was done, and some most extraordinary modes of inflicting self-punishment were discovered. The number of coats of mail and iron girdles which were delivered up were more than five hundred; they were put in a heap, and the Patriarch thought proper to show them to the Cardinal Ugolino and his company, for their edification. They were astonished on witnessing so great a love of such penitential austerities in men of such pure and holy lives. In their presence he forbade his brethren all sorts of indiscreet mortifications, which are injurious to the body; representing to them that they either hasten death, or throw the body into such a state of languor and weakness as makes it unfit for spiritual exercises, or are an impediment to the practice of good works, and to labouring for the glory of God, and to giving good example.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"When the devil sees a religious so fervent that the attempt to pervert her from following after good appears vain, he inflames her zeal, and incites her to imprudence in her mortifications. By this means he makes her violate her rule, and takes out of her hand the weapon of discretion. Thus deceived, she thinks she is doing what is best, and conceals her practice from her superiors, through apparent humility. In the mean time her strength is gradually lessened, her health is injured, her head is weak, and, in a word, she is ill, or at least very delicate; her habit of meditation and the practice of several virtues must necessarily be interrupted. With the loss of these spiritual exercises her joyfulness disappears, sadness begins to find its way into her heart, and, at last, enervates her good will. All now is over; God can now no longer count upon the services she used to render Him, nor her sisters upon her good example."—*St. Catherine of Bologna.*

To prevent this evil, which always does some injury to charity, the blessed Paul of the Cross, notwithstanding the deep hatred he bore to all sorts of sensuality, and the perfect detachment from sensual gratifications which he required from his subjects, treated them with great moderation, and wished that other superiors should do the same. When he sent Fathers on missions, he was accustomed to recommend them to take all the nourishment that was necessary, saying, "If our Lord shall be pleased to communicate to you an extraordinary spirit, you will remain even many days without food; but, not having such a spirit, you must regulate yourselves according to

(a) Rom. xii. 1.

the dictates of holy prudence, since the labours are great." And he used to repeat, "Honestavit illum in laboribus," and then the Lord "complevit labores illius."

When they returned home from these holy missions, after the good success of their work, then it was that his charity knew no bounds. He earnestly begged them to refresh themselves, and take the food and sleep that they required for the restoration of their strength; "and I remember," says a witness, "that on one occasion, though he was then infirm and almost crippled, he would wait upon us at table himself." He ordered them to take additional rest several nights; and all these things the servant of God performed in so pleasing a manner that he gained the hearts of all, and engaged them to persevere with new fervour in the apostolic ministry. He used to say, as if in justification of all these attentions: "A missionary is of more value than a retreat, through the great good he brings to souls." He sometimes also said: "It is better to lose a house than a missionary." In convalescence, he wished that the religious should act with discretion, for the recovery of their strength; therefore, he disapproved of their studying or kneeling too much, and so weakening themselves or preventing their speedy recovery and perfect cure. If they were sick, he would have no expense or labour spared for the recovery of their health. When they had sufficiently recovered their strength, to avoid the danger of tepidity and relaxation, he sweetly recommended them to resume holy observances. "Brother, how do you feel?" he would say; "it seems to me that you are well, so that you may now begin again the community life with the others."

He required from all punctuality and promptness in rising at night to matins, and in the morning to prime; but he would not allow the religious to be deprived of the least part of the repose allowed them by the rules. Regarding this, it is related in the process of his beatification that in the House of the Presentation, the Father Rector, then Father Fulgenzio di Gesu, a man of great fervour, who slept very little, rung prime about a quarter of an hour before the time. Father Paul heard of it, and, on visiting that house, said publicly, that he absolutely forbade them to ring before the proper time, giving as a reason, that the religious ought to have everything given to them as it is prescribed in the holy rules.

Actuated by the same principle, the saints, even those who were favoured with the highest contemplation, used to give themselves a little occasional relaxation to relieve their minds, that they might apply themselves with new fervour to the service of God and to the works of charity.

Cassian relates, that a hunter, seeing St. John the Evangelist amusing himself with a partridge, perched on his finger, asked him how a man of his high character could waste his time in such trifling? The saint, in return, said: "Why do you not always keep your bow bent?" "Because," replied the hunter, "were I to do so, it would lose all its force." "Be not surprised, then," rejoined the blessed apostle, "I sometimes relax my mind; for it is only to fit it the better for Divine contemplation."

It is related of St. Charles Borromeo, that, as a relaxation to the mind, he sometimes played at chess. Once, whilst he was thus occupied, some

persons were saying how they would employ themselves, if they knew they should die that hour. On hearing which, the saint said that he should go on with his recreation, for he had begun it simply for God's glory, and he desired nothing better than to be called away in the midst of an action begun for the glory of God.

St. Francis of Sales gives the following rule respecting corporal relaxation: "In recreation and conversation, a holy freedom is allowed. The subject of the discourse should tend to keep up a spirit of joy and amusement; discourse should be unaffected, though not inconsiderate, because simplicity always follows the rule of Divine love. Some little thing may be said not agreeable to all; still you need not comment upon everything. Holy simplicity does not hunt after such trifles, but leaves every event to God's providence, in which she entirely confides."

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"In all thy ways remember thy last end." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"He who desires to know what the will of God is, with respect to his state of life, or any other affair, must strip himself of all self-will, and, as far as he can, of all particular inclinations, and put himself entirely into God's hands, ready to embrace any state of life and yield to any call. Then, without expecting the intervention of an angel, let him put before himself the end for which God has created him; and, after weighing well the consequences involved in either course before him, let him make his choice. If he still doubt, let him consider what he would desire he had done, and which course he would wish he had selected, when he shall be at the point of death, and when presented before his Divine Judge."—*St. Ignatius.*

A LAWYER of high abilities, having been appointed consul for Tunis, applied to St. Vincent of Paul for advice as to the acceptance of the office, telling him that he wished to do what the saint should recommend as most conformable to God's will. St. Vincent at first said, he would rather that the nominee went to somebody else for counsel. As, however, the consul-elect insisted upon having the saint's advice, he told him to come again next day; when he answered, that having prayed for light during mass, and having reflected what counsel he should give, were he at that moment to die, he had decided in the affirmative, that is to say, that he should go to the post assigned him; "nevertheless," added the saint, "although I have candidly given my opinion, you are still at liberty to go or not to go." These words much edified the lawyer, from

(a) Eccles. vii. 40.

the simplicity and prudence they manifested. Another rule, which St. Ignatius proposes, to guide our decisions upon our own affairs, is to consider them as appertaining to another. "In order not to be deceived by self-love," says he, "in deliberating about one's own private interests, we should consider them as appertaining to others, and judge accordingly, by the light of truth. Similarly we should judge of another's interests and actions by supposing them our own."

This rule helps wonderfully to act reasonably and wisely towards others. "Reason," says St. Francis of Sales, "is the distinguishing prerogative of man, and yet how few act as it becomes rational beings: self-love is but too generally allowed to set aside reason, and to lead us insensibly into a thousand little injustices, which, though little, are nevertheless very hurtful. They are like the little foxes in the Canticles, of which no notice is taken because they are little, although from their numbers they do great damage among the vines. Reflect on this subject, and see whether the practices which I am about to adduce are not really unjust and unreasonable.

"We blame others for the slightest faults, and yet would excuse our own, though ever so grievous. We desire to sell dear and buy cheap. We would have justice exercised in the case of another man, but mercy and connivance in our own. We would have others take whatever we say in good part, but be allowed to be excessively sensitive upon what they say to us. We exact our own rights most rigorously, but would have others require as little as possible from ourselves. We are exceedingly punctilious in maintaining

our own rank, but would have others condescending and humble. We readily find fault with others, but would have no one find fault with us. Whatever we do for others appears to us considerable, but we count as nothing what others do for us. In a word, we have two hearts: one that is all mildness, charity, and consideration, when we are ourselves concerned; and another that is all hardness, severity, and rigour, when the interest is our neighbour's. We have a double set of weights, one to weigh out for our own profit, and the other to weigh in to our neighbour's loss. 'They have spoken with a double heart,' says holy David; that is, with two hearts; and to have divers weights, a greater to buy with, and a less to sell with, is declared in Deuteronomy to be an abomination before the Lord.

"Be reasonable, then, and just in all your actions. And to effect this, ever place yourself in your neighbour's situation, and your neighbour in yours, and then you will not err. Imagine yourself the seller when you buy, and yourself the buyer when you sell, and you will be equitable in all your dealings."

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"Be ye prudent as the serpent; he, on being in danger, exposes his whole body to preserve his head. In the same manner, we must risk everything, should it be necessary, to preserve the love and presence of our Lord whole and entire within us; for He is our head, and we are His members. This is the prudence which we are to unite with simplicity."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"When you converse with sinners, to draw them out of perdition, act as a man who throws himself into the water to save another from drowning; take care lest you yourself perish, whilst you hold out your hand to another."—*St. Ignatius.*

This saint used to give the following recommendations to missionaries, especially to those who went to foreign countries: "I. Ever remember, my brethren, that you are sent by Christ on a pilgrimage, that you are His stewards, and labourers in His vineyard. II. Take care of yourselves, and be always on your guard, because you will always be surrounded by dangers and enemies. III. Especially refrain your senses, and above all, your eyes. IV. Be the same at all times, and keep an equal mind amidst prosperous and adverse circumstances; be not disturbed by joy or sorrow. V. Never let your soul starve for lack of holy thoughts, but lift it up to God, in holy aspirations, when you are on the road, and when you are engaged in business; at your meals and in conversation, try to keep a quiet mind and a collected spirit, so that you may never lose a right intention, or a wise foresight in your labours. VI. Do not remark the faults of others; cover them when they are seen; search into your own, and be glad when they are made manifest.

Whatever you do, say, or think, consider, in the first place, whether it be for your neighbour's good, and pleasing in God's sight. Preserve always your liberty of mind, and see that you do not lose it through deference to the authority of any person, or the power of any accident. Do not lightly bind yourself in friendship with any man whatever; let judgment and reason first try him. Let the mind or the body be ever engaged in some good action. Be a fool in the opinion of men, and so you will be wise before God. Keep these things in your mind day and night; and when you go to bed, arm yourself by prayer.

"VII. A missionary ought to consider that he is called by his profession to converse, not with the holy but rather with the wicked; as the apostle speaks, he is in the midst of a perverse nation; he ought, therefore, to be prepared for any circumstance, so that the wicked lives of the children of this world may not offend or disturb him, or their deceits and follies deprive him either of the simplicity of the dove, or the prudence of the serpent."

The holy father was most anxious that his religious, whilst on the one side they were working in the cause of charity and for the salvation of souls, on the other should not relax in their love and study of religious perfection, which greatly depends on the observance of the rules. Hence he used to say: "To employ religious in the service of God, so as to interfere with the observance of their rule, is to destroy the tree for the sake of the fruit." For the same cause he forbade superiors of colleges to assist even bishops with their services, if domestic discipline was endangered by their being absent from their

colleges. He was also accustomed often to repeat his favourite Gospel maxim, to which he attributed in great part the conversion of St. Francis Xavier from a worldly to a spiritual life: "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, if he suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his own soul?"

It is related in history, that a young man, belonging to an illustrious family, being deeply penetrated with the importance of attaining his eternal salvation, presented himself to a holy abbot in the desert, and besought him most earnestly to receive him amongst the members of his community, saying, that he felt a most ardent desire of saving his soul. The holy abbot, thinking him to be unfit for the kind of life which was led by the religious under his charge, at first refused to grant his request. The fervent youth, without being discouraged by the refusal, renewed his supplication, which he ended, by saying, as before, that he felt the warmest desire of saving his soul. The abbot, edified by his fervour, but still firm in his opinion, said to him: "I am exceedingly pleased with your excellent disposition, but I perceive that you are a tender youth, brought up in refinement, and accustomed to all kinds of comfort. How can you endure the hardships and austerities of our life?" "Father," replied the pious youth, "I wish to save my soul." "I admire your good desires," repeated the abbot, "and sincerely wish that you may fulfil them. But what prevents you from attending to your eternal salvation in your father's house? What need is there of taking upon your shoulders the heavy burden which is borne by the religious of this community? The members of this house

must labour hard, pray unceasingly, keep silence constantly, watch, fast, and chastise their bodies most severely. How can you bear, let me ask you again, the fatigues, the privations, the austerities of our life?" The excellent youth, with great humility and increased fervour, made the same reply as before, saying, "Father, I wish to save my soul! I wish to save my soul!" The abbot, overcome by the fervour and constancy of the young man, admitted him into his community, where he lived and died in the odour of sanctity. Oh! that all Christians were animated by a similar anxiety and zeal for securing their eternal salvation!

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"Dearly beloved,—Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God." (a)—*The Evangelist St. John.*

"In spiritual exercises let all guard themselves against the deceits of the devil, and be ready to resist temptations when they arise; let them learn by what means they are to be absolutely overcome, labouring to gain true and solid virtues as well amidst spiritual aridities as in sweetness and consolation, mindful only to make continual spiritual progress in the service of God."—*St. Ignatius.*

THIS lesson of Christian prudence, which the saint gave to his religious, was, in great part, the result of his own experience. It is related in his life, that not long after his conversion, seeing

(a) 1 Epist. iv. 1.

how necessary human learning was to fit him for the spiritual service of his neighbour, and what great good might be effected by its aid, if well regulated and informed by the spirit of charity, he resolved to study. But he had not been working at the grammar long, when his mind began to be filled with new and lofty contemplations of Divine things; and when he went through the tenses of the verb "Amo," he was immediately and forcibly wrapped in the thought of God: neither was he able to restrain and master his thoughts, though he earnestly endeavoured to do so. Hence, he could neither learn his tasks, nor remember what he had learned before; so that after many days of schooling he had not advanced a single step. But, as purity of intention is always accompanied by clearness of perception, Ignatius soon discovered this fraud of the devil, and asked himself: "How is it, that when I am saying my prayers or assisting at mass, I do not experience the same excitement of thoughts and affections? It must, therefore, be an angel of Satan, who has transformed himself into an angel of light." He was not mistaken; and in order to drive the devil from him, he adopted those means which are made use of by the saints. He went with the schoolmaster to the church of Sta Maria, which was near the schoolhouse, and there casting himself at his feet, humbly begged pardon for his negligence at school; promised that he would henceforward study as diligently as he could, and begged him, if ever he caught him in the same fault, that he would chastise him as if he were a boy, in the presence of the rest.

Thus taught by experience, the saint was most

particular in cautioning his religious against those things which may please the imagination without grounding them in solid piety. Accordingly, he rebuked a father who had talked to a novice of raptures and ecstasies, and told stories of the singular states of the spirit; for he considered that the tender minds of novices ought to be impressed with lessons of solid virtue which become their institute, and not taught to desire things which may lead incautious souls into danger and delusion.

In the year 1553, Father Reginaldo, a pious and learned Dominican, who was very friendly to the society, called upon Ignatius, and told him of a nun belonging to their order, in a convent near Bologna, which he had the charge of, who had spiritual raptures, and who had no sensation in the flesh, even if she was pricked or burned, and could only be brought to herself when she was commanded by the superior, or by some one in her name. He also told him, that sometimes open wounds appeared on her hands, and feet, and side, and blood flowed from her head as from a crown of thorns, &c.; and that all this he had seen with his own eyes, and touched with his own hands. Finally, he asked Ignatius, who volunteered no remark, what he thought of this. The saint briefly replied: "Of all which your reverence has told me, her readiness to obey appears to me the least suspicious." When the friar was gone, Pietro Ribadeneira, who happened to be present, begged he would explain to him more fully what he thought of the story. The saint answered: "God operates chiefly on the soul, sanctifying it and filling it with his gifts, so that sometimes they run over even to the body; but this happens

very rarely, and only to souls that are very dear to him. The devil, on the contrary, who cannot work in the soul, makes use of a felicitous appearance of sanctity, with a view of deluding the simple, and lifting them up in pride:" and then he confirmed what he said by examples. The event proved his wisdom, for these rare marks of sanctity were discovered to be all diabolical fraud and delusion. In like manner, in the year 1541, Father Martin Santa Croce, who was then a novice, began speaking to him of Maddalena of the Cross, telling him strange things which she had said, and adding, that he had conversed with her, and knew her to be the most wise and holy woman in existence. The saint rebuked him severely, saying, that no member of the society ought to speak of her in such a way, or draw any conclusions as to her sanctity on such grounds. Not many years afterwards, this woman, who was renowned for her revelations and other appearances of extraordinary holiness throughout Spain, was convicted as a deceiver and an impostor. To help his religious to discover the deceits of the devil, and to defeat them, amongst many others, he proposed the following reflections: "When the devil despairs of inducing religious to return to the world, he tries to make them change their institute, and so lead them away from the order which is the best for them. He puts before solitaries the exalted nature of an apostolic vocation, and the sweets of solitude before those who are called to labour for the good of souls; so, again, in particular undertakings, that he may entice them away from the good which they are doing, he fills them with the desire of some greater good, intending, when

they get tired of it, to dissuade them from perseverance in it by some fresh delusion."

"The time of spiritual dryness and of spiritual consolation are both dangerous to the soul. By one the soul is disposed to sadness and distrust, as if that which is often the effect of God's loving Providence must proceed from His anger. By the other, the soul is in danger of vanity, as if God, in so caressing us, had regard to our merits, instead of our misery and need of encouragement. We ought, therefore, to manage so that these two periods may mutually assist each other. When we are in desolation, let us call to mind the Heavenly favours He has shown us; and when these favours again return, let us regard the weakness and poverty we experienced whilst His hand was closed. Moreover, in times of spiritual bitterness and disturbance, we must beware of changing the resolutions we made when peaceful and happy; and, when consolations abound, we must not be hasty to make vows, or impose upon ourselves any great or lasting obligations; but put off these to a time when the heat of sensible devotion has abated, and the matter may be decided by reason, instead of impulse."

The blessed Paul of the Cross, a man of consummate wisdom, used to give to his religious instructions of the same kind. "Seek," he wrote to one of them, "to render your prayer constantly more interior in pure faith, with great self-annihilation, not looking at consolations, but at the God of consolations."

"Of what use," he writes to another, "are these imaginations of visions? Oh! they are useless things, in which the devil plays an ugly game! The malicious wretch is not in a hurry,

but goes on quietly, the better to deceive." And to another: "These visions, elevations, splendours, and the like, the more frequent they are, the more they are to be suspected. It is better always to reject them, to drive them away with constancy, and never trust to them, chiefly in women, whose imaginations are more lively. By acting thus, we do wisely; for, if they are from God, they will have their effect, even though they are rejected; and if they come from the devil, which is more probable, by repelling them we free ourselves from delusion." Writing to a person of prayer, he says: "Yesterday afternoon I received your letter; and, as it does not seem necessary to answer all the points singly, I say to you only this: The things of God, and His gifts, give a deep knowledge of that infinite Majesty, and a deep consciousness of our own nothingness, so that the soul would cast herself under the feet, so to speak, of the very devils, so low is the opinion she has of herself. They cause a great detachment from all things, a strong love of the cross and of sufferings, great condescension in all that is not sin, with exact obedience; they infuse a deep peace and heavenly intelligence; they give a great attraction for holy prayer; sometimes they cause all these and other effects—sometimes a part; but what is certain is, that they always bring with them the low esteem of oneself, and deep veneration and respect for the Majesty of God. The works of the devil seem at first to bring some little devotion, but it does not last, and they generate a secret presumption and esteem of oneself; they bring, if not at first, after some short time, disquiet of mind, agitation of the passions, hardness of heart, and self-

esteem, from which proceed a disadvantageous opinion of others and a love of one's own ideas.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"Be ye zealous for the better gifts." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*
"Let all apply their minds to the attainment of solid and perfect virtues, and learn to esteem these far more than human knowledge, or any qualifications or gifts of nature; for these are interior endowments, and alone can impart worth to external gifts or acquirements."—*St. Ignatius.*

As the children of this world, who are influenced in their actions by carnal wisdom, are continually aiming at what is precious and valuable in the sight of men, so the children of light, who are animated by that wisdom which is spiritual and divine, aim at the practice and acquisition of what is precious and estimable in the sight of God—real and solid virtues. By which we understand:—

I. Those virtues which are internal, which embellish the heart, and are not merely external, presenting a beautiful appearance, attracting the admiration of men. For as in the natural and physical order of things, a shadow or phantom is not looked upon as a solid or substantial body, because it has only the appearance of a body, and possesses no substance; so those virtues, which are merely external and seen by men, and

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 31.

do not adhere to the soul, are but phantoms of no intrinsic worth. Such was the virtue of the Pharisees: they were remarkable for acts of piety and the strict observance of the law; but all this was merely external show, done to gain the applause of men; they therefore reaped no merit from their alms-deeds, their fastings, and prayers, but, on the contrary, incurred the severest displeasure of our Divine Redeemer, who continually upbraided them for their hypocrisy, and compared them to whited sepulchres, beautiful indeed in their external appearance, but full of corruption within.

II. Those are solid virtues, which are deeply rooted in the heart. We say that a tree which has no root, and is easily moved in every direction by the least blast of wind, is wanting in firmness; but, on the contrary, a tree which is deeply rooted in the earth, and resists the rudest storms, is looked upon as possessing great firmness and strength. So it is with virtues. Those which are not well rooted in the heart possess no solidity, but are like the reed, which is bent hither and thither and quickly broken; but those which are deeply rooted in the heart possess great solidity, and are like the vigorous oak, which stands firm against the most violent storms. Our Saviour, speaking of John the Baptist, asked the people what they went out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind, or one clothed in soft garments, that is, one not deeply rooted in virtue, one who makes merely a show of sanctity, without having its substance. No, he says; you went out to see a true and perfect servant of God, one endowed with deep and solid virtue.

III. Those are truly solid virtues which strike directly at the root of our passions, and which tend to subdue self-love, that great source of most of our sins. Of this description is the virtue of humility, which directly tends to bring down the pride of our haughty nature.

IV. Those also are truly solid virtues which make us resemble most nearly our crucified Redeemer, the great model shown to us on the Mount by our Heavenly Father, and which we are to copy. Hence we should study this our great model, and strive to acquire those virtues which shone so conspicuous in his life, passion, and death.

Lastly. Those are real solid virtues which enable us to fulfil more perfectly the duties of our state of life.

"In the practice of virtue," says St. Francis of Sales, "we should ever prefer that which is most in accordance with our duty, to that which is agreeable to our inclinations. When St. Paula, following her inclinations, practised austere mortifications, for the sake of enjoying spiritual consolations—whilst her duty was to have obeyed her superiors—St. Jerome censured her for adhering to austerities in opposition to the advice of her bishop. Thus again we read in the Acts, that the apostles, being commissioned to preach the Gospel, and to impart to souls the bread of life, judged that it would be wrong in them to forego such duties, in order to devote themselves to the care of the poor, although the care of the poor is in itself an excellent virtue. Every condition of life has its own peculiar virtues. The virtues of a prelate, of a prince, of a soldier, are all different one from another; and those of the married state

are different from those of widowhood. For, though all ought to possess all virtues in general, all are not required to practise all the virtues in an equal degree, but each person must practise specially such virtues only as are most suitable to the state of life to which he has himself been called. Of the virtues which belong not to our calling, we ought to prefer those which are most excellent, and not such as are most shining and brilliant."

A young virgin, clad in royal attire, and crowned with the olive branch, appeared to St. John, bishop of Alexandria, and said to him: "I am the king's eldest daughter; if thou wilt make me thy friend, I will conduct thee into his presence." The saint understood from this that God recommended to him mercy to the poor. Accordingly he devoted himself ever after so absolutely to the practice of this virtue, that he obtained, in consequence, the title of the almoner.

St. Louis, king of France, visited the hospitals, and served the sick with as much care and assiduity as though duty obliged him to such offices. St. Francis, above all things, loved poverty, which he called his queen; and St. Dominic, in like manner, preaching, from which the religious of his order are called preachers. St. Gregory the Great took delight in entertaining pilgrims, after the example of the patriarch Abraham; and, like him, received the King of Glory under the guise of a pilgrim. Tobias devoted himself to the burial of the dead. St. Elizabeth, a great princess as she was, delighted in nothing so much as self-abjection. St. Catharine of Genoa, after she became a widow, devoted herself especially to the service of hospitals.

In this the saints imitate embroiderers, who work upon a certain ground, in great varieties, silk, silver, and gold, so as to produce all kinds of flowers; for these pious souls make choice of some particular virtue, as a ground for the spiritual embroidery of all the other virtues, on which they regulate, unite, and embody all their actions and affections; thus, each one produces a robe, which, in the sight of God, resembles that of the spouse described by holy David, "*of cloth of gold, surrounded with variety.*" (a)

THIRTIETH DAY.

"Do nothing, my son, without counsel; and when it is done, thou wilt not repent it." (b)—*The Wise Man.*

"Counsel from a prudent and benevolent man is a benefit of great moment, for by this a man supplies the defect of his own prudence."—*St. Basil.*

This saint shows the great utility which arises from the counsel of wise and prudent men, by the example of Moses. For this great leader of God's chosen people, although deeply versed in the wisdom of the Egyptians, and favoured with a familiar intercourse with God, yet heeded and listened to the counsel of Jethro, who showed him the expediency of appointing judges and tribunes for the purpose of hearing the causes of the people.

(a) Psalm xliv. 10. (b) Eccles. xxxii. 2'.

St. Gregory, in his Dialogues, relates to this purpose a striking fact in the person of a deacon, calsed Paschasius, who was a man endowed with extraordinary virtue. "I have been told," says the holy pope, "that Paschasius, deacon of this Apostolic See, whose very valuable books on the Holy Ghost still exist with us, was a man of admirable sanctity, distinguished especially for his alms-giving, a helper of the poor, and a contemner of himself. This holy deacon, after his death, appeared to Germanus, bishop of Capua, asking suffrages for his soul, saying that he was in a state of purgation, because he had been obstinate in his own opinion in the election of the Pope Simachus, against the common opinion of the other electors, and had striven that another person, called Lawrence, should be raised to the pontificate."

Amongst the various reasons which are alleged by the masters of a spiritual life, to show the importance of profiting by another's counsel, in order to act wisely and prudently, one is our own natural corruption, which accompanies us from the cradle to the tomb. For, however a person may have purified his soul from the infection of his passions, he always retains, at the bottom of his heart, an inclination to gratify his self-love and to indulge his sensuality. Such being the case, it follows that even spiritual men, as long as they live in this corruptible body, which weighs down the soul, in judging on their own affairs, are always in some danger of choosing what is more pleasing and gratifying to nature than what is most honest and just. But such is not the case when a person has to form an opinion respecting other people's concerns. In this case

there is less danger of his being influenced by self-love, and, consequently, he is better qualified to judge with righteousness, that is, according to the strict rules of justice and truth. We read of the blessed Sebastian Valfré, that, although very learned and holy, he would proceed with the greatest precaution and consideration in every duty, so that he never either went to the court, or mounted the pulpit, or seated himself in the confessional, or received a notice, without first recommending himself to God, the Father of Lights, and to the most Holy Virgin Mary, the seat of wisdom; and in affairs of importance he did not fail to consult the opinions of men of virtue and knowledge. When counsel was asked of him, he never answered with precipitation, but took time for consideration, and offered up his usual fervent prayers; then he made a minute examination of the thing in question, maturely deliberating on the evidences of truth and error, and also determining the bounds of what was lawful and becoming.

MAY.

POVERTY AND CHASTITY.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. . . . Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."—MATT. v.

FIRST DAY.

"No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon." (a)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"The love of worldly possessions is a sort of birdlime, which entangles the soul, and prevents it from flying to God."—*St. Austin.*

ALL Christians are strictly obliged to keep their hearts detached from earthly possessions. This is an obligation incumbent upon every one who desires to save his soul. Our Divine Redeemer, speaking to all Christians in general, says, in the most solemn manner, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy mind." But how is it possible that we can comply with this precept of our Divine Master, if we do not keep our hearts detached from riches? "He who loves worldly objects," says St. Augustine, "he who fixes his affections upon the goods of this life, is earthly-minded, and, consequently, cannot be animated

(a) Matt. vi. 24.

with Divine love, for God detests a divided heart." Again, our blessed Redeemer says, in another place, that, "unless we renounce all that we possess, we cannot be His disciples." Now, it is evident that all persons must become disciples of Christ, if they would be numbered with the elect—if they would secure the salvation of their immortal souls; and yet He who is wisdom itself, and can neither deceive nor be deceived, declares that He will acknowledge as His true followers only those who renounce all which they possess; that is, those who keep their affections detached from earthly possessions, who fix their hearts upon God as their only treasure, valuing earthly goods only inasmuch as they enable them to serve Him with greater ease and perfection; hence the great St. Paul, writing to the early Christians, calls upon them to use this world as though they used it not, and to possess riches as though they possessed them not; that is, they must ever keep their hearts and affections detached from them, and value them only as means for loving and serving God, and working out their own salvation.

This truth, which the Gospel's light has rendered so conspicuous, was not altogether unknown to the ancient philosophers; for we read that the wisest of them, those most known for their love of wisdom and natural honesty, looked contemptuously upon riches, and even abandoned them, in order to apply more freely to the study of philosophy and to the practice of virtue. Thus we read that Crates, before going to Athens to study philosophy, sold all he possessed, and then, having collected his money together, threw it into the sea, that so he might be no longer entangled and

disturbed by the thought of his worldly goods, or drawn aside from the pursuit of wisdom by the love of riches. It is also related, that when Alexander the Great sent a very rich present to Phocian, the Athenian asked why Alexander had sent him so splendid a gift; and, upon being told that it was because the king looked upon him as the most virtuous man in Athens, Phocian replied: "If he wishes me then to preserve my virtue, let him keep his riches;" and forthwith sent back the present to Alexander.

St. Augustine mentions three examples from among the ancient Romans, which express a similar contempt of riches. The first is of Lucius Valerius, who was invested with the high dignity of consul, and yet was so great a lover of poverty as not to leave money at his death sufficient to pay the expenses of his funeral, so that he was buried at the public cost. The second is that of Cincinnatus, who on several occasions was called to the supreme office of dictator, was one of the most celebrated generals of the Roman state, and rescued his country on several occasions from the most imminent dangers. This great man was so poor as to possess but one field; and, as soon as he had defeated the enemies of his country and restored peace to the empire, he returned to the humble occupation of tilling his little farm, showing the utmost contempt of riches and worldly possessions. The third example cited by St. Augustine is Fabricius, who refused the most magnificent offers of wealth and honour made to him by the king of Epirus, fearing lest the possession of riches should turn him aside from his pursuit of virtue.

But what the ancient sages, who flourished

amongst the Pagan nations before the coming of Christ, did in the practice of poverty is as nothing when compared to what has been done by the followers of Christ from the establishment of the Gospel to the present time. The apostles, whom Christ chose to the sublime office of preaching his Gospel to all nations, and of establishing his Church amongst them, answered to the call to the apostleship by leaving all things to follow their Divine Master. Instructed by their example, the first Christians of Jerusalem evinced the greatest detachment from worldly riches. All things were in common amongst them, "For as many as were owners of land or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things sold, and laid it down at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was made to every one according as he had need." (r) This example of holy poverty, which flourished amongst the first Christians, was followed also, in a special manner, by the successors of the apostles, and other pastors and ministers of the church: for in the primitive times there was no distinction of ecclesiastical property. The bishop, with his clergy, had one common fund, the care and administration of which was committed to some faithful and trusty person by the bishop, and not only were he and his clergy maintained from it, but provision was also made for the churches and the poor. It was whilst this holy spirit of poverty continued in this its first fervour and purity, that the church generally possessed the greatest lights of holiness and sanctity; and the highest models of charity and zeal for God's honour and glory flourished on every side.

(r) Acts iv. 34. 35.

When, in the course of time, a division was made in this property—one part being set aside for the bishop, another for his priests, a third for the expenses of the church, and a fourth for the support and relief of the poor—it was noted as some little breach of that spirit of fervour which marked the first ages, though the clergy still observed holy poverty, and lived in common, the bishop providing for the needs of each from the general fund.

But gradually, as the spirit of fervour grew cold, and piety became less ardent, men began to love the comforts and conveniences of life, and could no longer bear the practice of perfect poverty. Hence, by degrees, special divisions were made of the common property, and particular livings or provisions appointed for the clergy, according to their various offices. From this time, however, we find not so many bright examples of sanctity and holiness, not so many luminaries of holy charity; and if we behold some who resembled those glorious saints of the primitive church, they are such as have endeavoured to walk in the footsteps of those apostolic men, and have imitated them in their love of holy poverty, in their contempt of worldly riches and earthly comforts; men who have, in fine, embraced a life of self-denial and holy poverty: such were St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, St. Philip Neri, St. Liguori, &c.

SECOND DAY.

"Woe to you rich, for you have your consolation." (a)
"Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven." (b)—*Our Blessed Lord.*
"Seldom, indeed, is it that they who possess riches attain to eternal rest, for Truth expressly says: 'Hardly shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of Heaven.'"—*St. Gregory.*

Our blessed Lord, in giving us the history of Dives and Lazarus, says, that the former, who was very rich, was at the moment of death buried in hell; while the latter, who was very poor, was carried into Abraham's bosom. Yet, if we examine the sacred text, we find that there is nothing said of Dives being a very wicked man, of his having committed very grievous sins, it is only said that he feasted sumptuously every day, and showed no compassion to the poor, and he was condemned to eternal torments at the moment of his death; which proves, that to live amidst the riches and luxuries of life is a path beset with peril, and leading to eternal misery. "Blessed is the man," says the Holy Ghost, "who has not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in riches. Who is he, and we will praise him? for he hath done wonderful things in his life." Which words show how difficult it is to live in the midst of abundance, to enjoy the riches of this world, and not to be entangled by them, nor to fix the heart's affections on them. When our Blessed Redeemer had uttered those fearful words: "That it is easier for a camel to

(a) Luke vi. 24. (b) Matt. xix. 24.

pass through the needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," His disciples were filled with amazement, and asked Him, "Who, then, can be saved?" To whom He answered: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible;" thereby intimating to us, that the salvation of the rich—of those who abound in earthly goods, is to be attributed to an extraordinary grace, is a peculiar exhibition of Divine mercy. The angelic Doctor St. Thomas, treating on this subject, shows, that riches, in the present state of our degraded nature, are apt to oppose three great obstacles to the perfection of Divine love.

First: a trouble and *anxiety of mind*, which the possession of wealth generally brings with it. According to which, St. Gregory calls riches, "thorns," which wound the mind of man, and choke the good seed of virtue in his heart; this he grounds upon the explanation Christ gave to the parable of the seed, where, having described one part as falling among thorns, so that when it grew up it was choked by them, and produced no fruit, He said, that by the thorns were to be understood the solicitudes of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, which prevent the word of God from producing fruit in the soul. St. Bernard, speaking of this anxiety which riches cause, says that it arises from three sources: first, from the solicitude which rich men have to preserve the treasures which they possess, and to secure them from danger, since they are continually tormented with troublesome fears of losing them. Secondly, because they are not satisfied with what they possess, but are ever anxious to increase their stores, to add to their

wealth, to multiply their possessions; for, as the Holy Scripture says, "through anxiety for increase, the men of riches are never contented." Thirdly, because rich men are often loaded with trouble from losses which they meet with; they are disturbed by the privation of some little of what they have acquired with so much pains. Thus, riches are far from being a source of true enjoyment, or of solid peace of mind; on the contrary, they make men a prey to the greatest anxiety, which is always an obstacle to the perfection of Divine love. This truth we may also learn from observation of what passes around us daily. England is wallowing in riches; it is a nation of merchants, the richest nation in the world. If we raise our eyes, we see hundreds and thousands of busy souls, full of anxious thoughts how to increase their possessions, men who give themselves no rest, spare no pains, shrink from no labour, to succeed in their various worldly speculations, and whose minds are ever torn with anxious cares, without enjoying the blessing of that peace which our Divine Saviour has left as a most precious inheritance to his disciples.

The second obstacle which temporal possessions, according to St. Thomas, oppose to perfection, is the disorder which they generally produce *in the affections.* It is true that it is possible to be possessed of worldly wealth, and yet not be attached to it; it is possible to live in the midst of abundance, to have great riches, and yet to keep the heart detached from them; yet it is very difficult, and requires a virtue which but few are possessed of; this arises from our natural corruption, and the tendency we have to fix our affections on sensible objects, and the

gratification of our sensual appetites. In themselves riches are not evil, but a temporal blessing; and if we were still in the state of original innocence, they would help us to practise virtue; they would lead us to glorify God, the giver of every best gift; they would be so many incentives, urging us to the love of our Creator; in short, we should have no difficulty in raising ourselves, by means of them, to a more intimate union with God: but with all our powers and faculties wounded, our will corrupted, and violently bent on earthly and sensual objects, unless we are most watchful, unless we keep a constant guard over ourselves, these earthly goods easily become a source of temptation, and draw our affections to themselves, instead of leading us to God; they gradually induce us to fix our hearts upon them as our end, instead of conducting us to God. This is, alas! but too frequently the case, not only in those who lead a worldly life, but even in those who outwardly attend to their religious duties; for were we to examine into their interior dispositions, we should often find some criminal attachment to the goods of this life. This is shown in the example which Holy Scripture gives us of the young man who came to our Saviour, asking what he should do to become perfect: for when our Saviour said to him, "Keep the commandments," he answered, that he had kept them all from his youth; he was exact in all his religious duties: but when counselled, if he would become perfect, to go and sell all he possessed, and give it to the poor, he went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions. We do not find any mention made of him afterwards in Scripture, and the holy

Fathers seem to doubt very much about his salvation. Why, then, did he leave our Blessed Redeemer so sorrowful? It was because he was attached to his riches, because his heart was fixed upon his earthly possessions, because he could not endure the thought of abandoning his worldly goods for the love of God. This example shows how difficult it is to enjoy the riches of this world, and keep our hearts detached from them. Indeed, if we look round at the men of the world, at the rich ones of this earth, how few shall we find who keep their affections detached from their possessions; how few shall we find who use this world as though they used it not, who possess as though they possessed not.

The third reason given by St. Thomas, why riches are impediments to perfection, is, that *they* easily *generate a spirit of pride.* Riches do not make a man virtuous, do not make him more pleasing to God, and therefore are no just cause for glory; our glory ought to be in that which gives some virtuous quality to man, in that which makes us better in the sight of God, in that which acquires for us some merit for eternity. Nevertheless, it is a fact supported by daily experience, that riches, which of themselves bestow no right to glory, on account of the corruption of our fallen nature, tend to foment our self-love, and to swell our pride. There are too many who, as Holy David says, "glory in the multitude of their riches," who, for that reason, look upon themselves as privileged beings, raised above the common race of men, and alone worthy to fill all high stations, to enjoy all dignities, who resent the least injury offered to them,

and look down with contempt upon the poor, not hesitating to oppress and despise them. It is for this reason that the saints, far from judging with the children of this world, looked upon riches with a sort of dread, and strove with great diligence to love holy poverty, and to infuse the same love into others. The contempt which St. Vincent of Paul evinced for the goods of this earth was so great, that he may be said to have surpassed all the ecclesiastics of his age. His dress was as common as it could be. His food corresponded to his clothing, and the only distinction between himself and his companions was his more austere penance. As to his lodging, it was of the poorest sort. A chamber without fireplace, a pallet without curtains or mattress, two straw-bottomed chairs, and a wooden crucifix, constituted all his furniture. "I acknowledge," said the first physician of the king, in his deposition, "that I was completely astonished when I saw a man of such merit and reputation lodged so miserably, and having only such furniture, as he could not absolutely dispense with."

This saint was used to say, when speaking to the members of his congregation: "A man who has the true spirit of poverty fears nothing, can do everything, goes everywhere. He thinks himself happy in following the example of the Saviour, who began by a manger, and finished by a cross."

St. Philip, on discovering that one of his penitents had got together a little property, with some eagerness, said to him: "My son, before you possessed this property, you had, to my mind, the face of an angel, and I took pleasure in looking at you; but now your countenance is

changed; you have lost your merry looks, and are downcast, so look to yourself."

He one day asked Egidio Calvelli, a brother of the congregation, if he would like to have some money. Egidio answered: "Father, I have no desire for any such thing." Upon which, Philip rejoined: "If that be so, I vote we go to Paradise, and I will conduct you there myself, on condition that you never allow a desire of riches to rest in your mind." He was continually putting his penitents in mind of the same lesson, and had almost always in his mouth his favourite maxim, that all the love we have for creatures is so much taken from God.

When the princess of Piedmont signified to St. Francis of Sales her intention of allowing him a handsome pension for his office of royal almoner, the holy bishop replied, saying: "I feel myself happy in my poverty; I fear riches; they have ruined thousands, and they might prove fatal to me."

THIRD DAY.

"If riches be desired in life, what is richer than wisdom, which maketh all things?" (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"They that will become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evils, which some coveting have erred from the path, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, fly these things, and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

THERE is, perhaps, no vice which is more apt to conceal itself from man's observation than that of longing after riches. "No one will acknowledge himself to be avaricious," says St. Francis of Sales; "all disavow such baseness and degeneracy. Hence they excuse themselves, on the plea of being burdened with children, of being under the necessity of firmly establishing themselves in the world, and the like: they have never too much; there is always some necessity or other for acquiring more: even the most avaricious not only deny that they are avaricious, but think so in their consciences. Avarice is a malignant fever, which renders its victim more and more insensible as its burning and raging power increases. As the fire from Heaven, which Moses beheld in the bush, burned within it, but did not consume it, so when the profane fire of avarice burns within the avaricious man, he is not conscious of its intense heat; but, though on fire,

(a) Wis. viii. 5. (b) 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, 11, 12.

he boasts of the most agreeable coolness, and considers his insatiable drought as a pleasing and natural thirst.

"If you ardently, and constantly, and anxiously desire riches which you have not, although you may say that you do not desire to acquire them unjustly, you are really avaricious, in the same manner as the man who ardently, constantly, and anxiously desires to drink, although he ask nothing but water, is evidently in a high state of fever."

Those again who set their heart upon what they already possess are, as the saint remarks, parched with this fever. "If you," says he, "are strongly attached to the goods which you possess, if you are over-anxious about them, if your heart is wedded to them and your thoughts ever upon them, if you have a lively and restless fear of losing them, believe me you are still in a kind of fever; as those who are parched with fever drink the water which is at hand with a certain avidity and intense gratification, neither natural nor common to persons in health. It is not possible to take great delight in an object without having a strong affection for it. If, on occasion of any loss of goods, you become sad, afflicted, and dejected, be assured that you have a strong affection for them; for nothing so manifestly discovers our affection for them as our affliction for the loss of them. Do not, therefore, allow yourself fully and expressly to desire what you do not possess; and do not bury your heart in what you do possess, nor grieve immoderately when it is taken from you. Then will you have reason to believe, that, though rich in effect, you are not rich in affection, but poor in spirit, and

consequently blessed, for yours is the kingdom of Heaven."

Oh ! how lamentable is the condition of those Christians who allow their thoughts and desires to be constantly bent upon the perishable goods of this world. "What will worldly pride avail them? and the boasting of riches, what will it profit them? Behold, they will sleep their sleep, and all the men of riches will find nothing in their hands."

What will become, in a while, of all worldly riches, when the earth, and all that is in it, shall be burnt up by fire? "The day of the Lord shall come," says the Apostle St. Peter, "as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat; and the earth, and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up. Seeing, then, that all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought we to be in holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord, by which the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat? But we look for new heavens and a new earth, according to His promises, in which justice dwelleth. Wherefore, dearly beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent, that ye may be found undefiled and unspotted to Him in peace." (a)

Woe to them who, instead of laying up treasures in Heaven, which last for ever, are only bent to lay up treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break

(a) 2 Peter iii. 10—14.

through and steal. For what will be the end of all their toils and cares but bitter sorrow and anguish of heart? "Go to now, ye rich men," says the Apostle St. James, "weep and howl in your miseries, which shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are cankered, and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up to yourselves wrath against the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your fields, which, by fraud, has been kept back by you, crieth; and the cry of them hath entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have feasted upon the earth; and in riotousness you have nourished your hearts in the day of slaughter." (a)

But the evil which those unhappy Christians, who are ever anxiously and constantly aiming and longing after riches, experience, is not all confined to the next life; it begins to affect them here; for the goods of this earth, instead of satiating their desires, only stimulate more and more their hunger and thirst, and increase the pain and anxiety of their hearts. Witness Solomon, who thus speaks of himself: "I made me great works; I built me houses, and planted vineyards; I made gardens and orchards, and set them with trees of all kinds; and I made me ponds of water, to water therewith the wood of the young trees; I got me men-servants and maid-servants, and had a great family; and heads of oxen and great flocks of sheep, above all that were before me in Jerusalem. I heaped together for myself silver

(a) St. James v. 1—5.

and gold, and the wealth of kings and provinces; I made me singing-men and singing-women, and the delights of the sons of men, cups and vessels to serve to pour out wine; and I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me, and whatsoever my eyes desired I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared; and I esteemed this my portion, to make use of my own labour. And when I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to the labours wherein I had laboured in vain, I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun." (a)

Wherefore the Apostle St. Paul, enlightened from above to see the vanity and deceitfulness of worldly riches, thus writes to his disciple Timothy: "Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God (who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy), to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life." (a)

(a) Eccles. ii. 4—11. (b) 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

FOURTH DAY.

"If riches abound, set not thy heart upon them." (a)—*Holy David.*

"Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it; lest, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that see it begin to mock him, saying: 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, about to make war against another king, doth not first sit down and think whether he be able, with ten thousand, to meet him that, with twenty thousand, cometh against him? Or else, whilst the other is yet afar off, sending an embassy, he desireth conditions of peace. So, likewise, every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple." (b)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

By these two comparisons, our Saviour gives us to understand that, as money is necessary to maintain a war and carry on a building, so to be poor in spirit, to be detached from earthly possessions, is necessary to carry on a war against the enemies of our salvation, and to raise up the spiritual building of Christian perfection. St. Austin, explaining this passage, says, that the tower signifies the perfection of a Christian life, and the stock required for building imports a total renunciation of our goods, which makes us be in a better state for serving God, and have less reason to fear the devil, for hereby his points of attack are reduced in number, and he has scarcely anything left to lay hold of.

Deeply impressed with this truth, the venerable Benedict Labré, from his tender years, lived totally disengaged from all affection to earthly

(a) Psalm lxi. 11. (b) St. Luke xiv. 28—33

things, and attached to God alone. From the time he undertook the very rigid manner of life with which God inspired him, he never gave a thought to his country, connections, or friends; forgotten by them, he went, like St. Alexis, poor, ragged, and a pilgrim, wherever the hand of Omnipotence guided him, trampling, in effect, as well as in affection, on everything flattering and brilliant in the world. Despising the world, he lived most happily amongst his rags, miseries, and sufferings; and he judged with St. Paul, that everything the world holds in the greatest esteem is deserving only to be trampled on as dung when it would withdraw us from God. Never did a miser love his riches as he loved his poverty; hence arose his generous refusal of everything which the compassion of others offered him, his negligence about procuring alms, and his ready distribution of them to others. In some towns through which he passed in his pilgrimages, persons, seeing his poor and ragged clothes, offered him shoes, stocking, shirts, and even many things together. This happened often in Rome, where the spirit of charity flourished wonderfully; but he refused everything in an agreeable manner, showing his sense of the favours, and saying, modestly and cheerfully, that "he had no wants; what he had on was sufficient for him; let it be given to the needy." To others he said: "The poor should not be well clothed; this is too good for a poor man; the poor should live by alms." Some with holy importunity even obliged him to accept something, on which occasions he did so not to afflict them, but afterwards gave it away; or, if he used it, so arranged it as to make it truly a poor man's garment. A good lady, in Rome,

seeing him pass one day with his head uncovered in very severe weather, when a quantity of snow had fallen, observing how benumbed he was with cold, and ill-protected by his rags, offered him a little woollen cap, through charity. Benedict refused it, but, when entreated, accepted the charity; shortly after, however, the lady chanced to see him, bareheaded as before, and his cap on the head of another poor person, by which detachment she was greatly edified. An enemy to money, he never asked for a farthing; and if any one spontaneously gave him more than sufficed for his miserable daily nourishment, he distributed it to the poor, or put it in the little box for alms at the church-doors. This was noticed with admiration, and attested by many persons. Some said that it was useless to give alms to Benedict, for he gave all away; he did not want it. Once, a poor woman, who was begging amongst a crowd of devout venerators of the Blessed Virgin dell' Archetto, in Rome, received, to her astonishment, an alms from Benedict, who was more ragged than any other; and she was so surprised that she could not help exclaiming aloud, with wonder, "One poor man gives alms to other poor people!" Several times it happened that some gave him, by mistake, silver instead of copper; and, when he perceived it, he ran after them and restored it, telling them of their mistake. The charity of a most exemplary prelate, who witnessed the great devotion and quiet attitude of Benedict, covered with rags, before the most blessed Sacrament, which was exposed for the forty hours' prayer, in the church of Sta. Maria, in Monterone, made him place one of his servants at the door of the church, to offer him, in the name of a benefactor,

a monthly pension for his necessities. Benedict thanked him, saying, he did not want it, and with his accustomed modesty proceeded on his way.

The same spirit of holy poverty shone forth most conspicuously in the life of the blessed Paul of the Cross. He was poor in his food, poor in his clothing, poor in everything that appertained to his use. It was not sufficient for him, to depend upon his brother, and to ask permission from him before taking anything; which he practised with extraordinary virtue as long as he lived, though he was always superior, and was never bound to ask such permissions; but he always desired that his beloved poverty should be his inseparable companion in every act of his life.

A local superior once had not furnished him with a habit for the winter, though that which he had had become very thin; and as the good father was old and infirm, he suffered much from cold, which increased his pains; yet, even in this necessity, he would not have a new habit, but contented himself with receiving, as a charity, one that had been worn by a lay-brother.

FIFTH DAY.

"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, being rich, He became poor for your sakes, that, through His poverty, you might become rich." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Poverty was not found in heaven; it abounded on earth,—but man did not know its value. Therefore the son of God longed after it, and came down from heaven to choose it for Himself, to make it precious to us."—*St. Bernard.*

If we examine the whole course of our Saviour's life, we find Him on all occasions shunning worldly comforts, and exhibiting the most perfect model of poverty, and contempt of earthly goods. His entrance into life was in the most abject poverty, for we behold him born in a stable and lying in a manger, rejected from the society of men, and forced to seek an abode with the beasts of the field. Again, through life the most perfect poverty and deprivation of all worldly goods marked His steps. He was so poor that He had not wherewith to pay the tribute, nay He had not where to lay His head, for, as He Himself declared, "The foxes have their holes and the birds their nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head." And as poverty was the virtue He first practised on entering into life, so was it also the last of which He gave us an example in His death, for He died poor and destitute of everything, stripped of His very garments, as "a worm, and no man; as the reproach of men and the outcast of the people." Oh! when we think of Bethlehem, with its lonely stable and humble crib; when we be-

(a) 2 Cor. viii. 9.

hold the wisdom of God thus annihilating Himself, and lying upon a little straw, in want of everything; when we see Him in the humble cottage of Nazareth, labouring with holy Joseph for his very bread, unknown and unregarded by the world; when, in fine, we ascend Calvary, and behold Him there hanging upon the cross, naked and destitute and stripped of all things, how ought we to despise and contemn with our Redeemer what the world so much loves and extols—its riches and conveniences, and to love with Him to be poor and despised. How ought we to esteem that as darkness which the world calls light, and to consider that as the highest wisdom which the world calls folly and blindness. This bright example of the Saint of saints was followed by all His fervent disciples and followers in perfection, especially by the early Christians, who were full of charity and glowing piety. In the course of time, however, this fervour and piety which so distinguished them became colder; the love for holy poverty decreased; and then it was that Almighty God raised up in His church religious orders or societies of persons, who, renouncing all earthly goods and possessions, and consecrating themselves to His love, might hold up to the world a living example of the piety and fervour of the first Christians, and so excite men continually to despise the riches and pleasures of this world, and to value those only which serve to unite them more closely to their sovereign good.

It is related, in the life of St. Francis of Assisium, that when he presented the rule of his order to the pope for his approbation, it was strongly opposed by some cardinals, on account of the severe poverty which he required from his reli-

gious. But the Cardinal John of St. Paul, a man very remarkable for his piety, rising in his defence, thus addressed the other cardinals, in presence of the pope: "If you reject the prayers of this poor man, on pretence that his rule is novel and too austere, let us take care that we do not reject the Gospel itself, since the rule, for which he solicits approval, is in conformity with what the Gospel teaches; to say that evangelical perfection, or the vow to practise it, contains anything unreasonable and impossible, is to blaspheme against Jesus Christ, the author of the Gospel." The pope, struck with this reasoning, said to Francis: "My son, pray to Jesus Christ that He may make known His will to us, that so we may favour your wishes." The servant of God retired to pray, and soon after returned, and set forth this parable:

"Most holy Father, there was a beautiful young girl, who was very poor and who lived in a wilderness. The king of the country, who saw her, was so charmed with her beauty that he took her for his wife. He lived some years with her, and had children, who all resembled their father, and had, nevertheless, the beauty of their mother. He then came back to his court. The mother brought up her children with great care, and, after some time, said to them: 'My children, you are born of a great king; go and find him, and tell him who you are, and he will give you all that is befitting your birth. As to myself, I will not leave this desert, and I even cannot.' The children went to the king's court, who, seeing their resemblance to himself, and that they had the beauty of their mother, received them with pleasure, and said to them: 'Yes, you are my true

children, and I will support you as the children of a king, for, if I have strangers in my pay, if I maintain my officers with what is served at my table, how much more care should I not have for my own children, the offspring of so beautiful a mother? As I love the mother extremely, I will keep the children she has borne me, at my court, and I will feed them at my table.'

"This king, most holy Father," continued Francis, "is our Lord Jesus Christ. This beautiful girl is Poverty, which, being everywhere despised and cast off, was found in this world as in a desert. The King of kings descending from Heaven, and coming upon earth, was so enamoured with her, that he married her in the manger. He has had several children by her, in the desert of this world—apostles, anchorites, cenobites, and many others, who have voluntarily embraced poverty. This good mother sent them to their Father, with the marks of royal poverty, as well as of her humility and obedience. This great king received them kindly, promising to maintain them, and saying to them: I Who cause my sun to shine upon the just and on sinners, Who give my table and my treasures to pagans and heretics, Who bestow on them food, clothing, and many other things, how much more willingly shall I give you, who are born in the poverty, of my much-cherished spouse, what is necessary.

"It is to this celestial King, most holy Father, that Poverty, His spouse, sends these her children whom you see here, and they are not of a lower condition than those sent before them. They do not degenerate; they have the comeliness both of their Father and their mother, since they make profession of the most perfect

poverty. There is, therefore, no fear of their dying of poverty, for they are the children and heirs of the immortal King, born, indeed, of a poor mother, in the image of Jesus Christ, by the virtue of the Holy Ghost; and they must be brought up in the spirit of poverty, in a very poor order. If the King of Heaven promises that such as imitate Him shall reign with Him eternally, with how much more confidence ought we not to believe that He will give the necessaries of this life, which he usually gives, and with so much liberality, to the good and to the bad?"

Palladius relates that Melania the elder, a noble Roman lady, on coming into Egypt and hearing of the sanctity of St. Pambo, went to visit him in his monastery on Mount Nitria, taking with her three hundred pounds weight of silver, which she presented to him, desiring he would accept of some part of the store with which God had blessed her. The holy man was sitting at his work, making mats, when she came in with St. Isidore, the administrator of the hospital of Alexandria; and, without interrupting his work or looking at her or her present, he contented himself with telling her, God would reward her charity. Then, turning to his disciple, he said, "Take this, and distribute it amongst the brethren that are in Lybia and in the islands whose monasteries are the most poor of all; but give no part of it to the monasteries of Egypt, because this country is rich and abounds in all things." The lady stood still, expecting that he would give her his benediction, or express, at least, his esteem for so considerable a present by word or other sign; but seeing that he went on with his work, without once casting so much as

an eye towards the chest of money which she had given to him, she said to him, "Father, I do not know whether you are aware that there are three hundred pounds weight of silver here?" "Daughter," said he, without once taking his eye off his work, "He to Whom you make this offering knows very well how much it weighs, without your telling Him. If, indeed, you had given it to me, you might have had some reason to inform me of its weight; but if you designed it as an offering to God, Who did not disdain, but even preferred, the widow's two mites to the large offerings of the rich, do not say any more about it." Melania told this herself to Palladius.

SIXTH DAY.

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come and follow Me." (a).—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"As riches are the instruments of all vices, because they render us capable of putting even our worst desires into execution, so a renunciation of riches is the origin and preserver of virtues.—*St. Ambrose.*

THE great St. Anthony was about twenty years old, when the death of his parents left him master of all their wealth, which was considerable, with the care of a little sister, who was very young. Scarcely six months had passed after their death, when one day going to church, according to his

(a) Matt. xix. 21.

custom, he thought within himself, how the apostles had left all to follow our Lord, and how the primitive Christians had sold their possessions and laid the price at the feet of the apostles, to be by them distributed to such as were in want; and how great would be the reward in heaven of those who acted in a similar manner. At his coming into the church, he heard the Gospel read out of Matt. xix., where our Saviour says to the young man that was rich: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." These words he took as addressed to himself by our Lord, and particularly designed for him: and, in consequence of this divine call, he presently parted with his whole estate in lands, sold his moveables, which were of great value, and distributed the price to the poor, only reserving a small sum for the use of his sister. Some time after, when he had heard in the church that part of the Gospel read, Matt. vi., where our Lord warns His disciples not to be careful for to-morrow, he concluded to part with his house also, and to distribute all that remained to the poor; having, therefore, recommended his young sister to the care of some devout virgins, to be trained up in their way of life, he quitted the world, and entered upon the narrow and arduous path of religious perfection.

St. Louis Gonzaga was a prince possessed of much wealth, and surrounded with comforts of all sorts. Yet, enraptured with the beauty and excellence of Christian perfection, he petitioned his father to allow him to renounce all his possessions, as if they were nothing more than filth and dirt. His father, who was a man of the

world, did not understand him, nor comprehend how it was possible for his son to differ from himself in his views so widely, and opposed himself to his design by continual delays and resistance, till the poor youth was brought almost to the grave. But, at length, Louis conquered all, and turning his back upon the world, threw himself into the bosom of the religious life with more joyful alacrity than a spouse into the arms of her beloved. Animated by a similar love for perfection, Paula and Eustochia, noble Roman princesses, left Rome for Bethlehem, and renounced their gilded palaces for an humble cottage. Theodore, and Charles the Fifth, emperors and kings of the earth, exchanged their splendid courts for narrow cells, the imperial purple for humble monastic habits. Actuated by the same spirit, many saintly religious, after leaving all that they possessed, have applied themselves to practise holy poverty in its greatest perfection. In one of the memoranda which the blessed Leonard wrote, and always carried about with him, the following words were found: "I desire to observe the rules of holy poverty, with all the strictness and vigour with which St. Francis and his community observed it, and to use every means to introduce it, in all its vigour, into the convent." One, who was his confessor for many years, gave testimony to his love of poverty in the following words: "So great was Father Leonard's love of holy poverty, that if he had not been prevented, he would have carried it to an extreme in his dress, eating, furniture, and everything; and he endeavoured to infuse this spirit into the minds of all the religious, and rejoiced whenever he saw this virtue shine pre-eminent. He never wore a new

habit, but ever one which had been used by others, and was almost worn out; this he patched, and rejoiced when it became torn and ragged. Once, only, he put on a new one, and that was in the year 1746, when he was sent to give missions in the dioceses of Bologna and Ravenna; the weather was very cold, and as he was advanced in years, the superior of the convent of St. Bonaventura in Rome, having compassion on his infirmities, sent him a new one, with an order to wear it, which in obedience he was obliged to do, but in order to show his poverty, he had it covered with old patches. He exhorted his brethren in religion, with great earnestness, to observe holy poverty in their dress, telling them, that it was most unbecoming to appear vain under a poor and humble habit; and that as a rich and costly dress is becoming a nobleman in the world, so a worn and patched habit is becoming in a poor religious, the follower of Jesus Christ."

The furniture of his room was only two boards on which he slept, a covering, one chair, and a small table for writing. During the nine years he was superior of the convent in Florence, the only table he had was a board nailed against the wall, and for a seat he had nothing but the end of the board on which he slept. Hung round the walls were two or three pictures without frames, and the crucifix which he wore when he gave missions; he would not have by him even those little devotional things which the superiors of convents are accustomed to have. He did not even possess necessary articles, such as scissors, penknife, and needles; if he wanted any of these things, he borrowed them of others, and returned

them as soon as he had made use of them. His room contained nothing besides the things mentioned, except a little box, in which he kept his writings, his breviary, his rule, his spectacles, a hair-shirt, two disciplines, and a wooden cross with spikes of iron, which he wore next his skin, his rosary, and a small case, which contained the images of the Immaculate Conception, and St. Vincent Ferrer, with which he used to bless the sick.

We read of St. Thomas Villanova, that after he became archbishop, he never lost a particle of that simplicity and poverty which he had been accustomed to practise in the cloister. For several years he wore the same habit as at the monastery, and did not change it till it was no longer wearable. As long as his doublet could be worn by putting new sleeves to it he would not give it up, but dressed himself in it, shabby as it was, to the very last. He mended his stockings himself, keeping for that purpose a needle and thread, and other useful necessaries. When about to purchase a new habit, a friend persuaded him to let it be of a thinner kind of stuff, so as to be light and more befitting an archbishop. He consented, thinking it would cost less, but on finding out his mistake, he begged his friend to take it back again, saying, "Sir, you have a right to wear this thin cloth, you are master of your own property; but I, who am a poor religious, and have nothing that does not belong to the poor, cannot use the stuff you have brought for me without doing them an injury." His friend, to satisfy him, took it for his own use, and bought for the holy prelate a common and thick serge, which he wore till it was so shabby, his servants were

ashamed of it, and blushed to see him so poorly clothed; so much were they distressed, that they agreed to petition him in a body to leave it off. The saint acquiesced, and caused another robe equally coarse to be made; nevertheless, he kept the old one to mend the other when necessary; he was generally so poorly and meanly dressed, that the most humble religious would have found it hard to imitate him without blushing. The public profession the saint made of poverty displeased some of the children of the world, because they looked on it with the eyes of the flesh. In his cathedral, even, there were some canons to whom it was unpleasant, and who entreated him, for the honour of the church he governed, to be better clothed, urging, that his dress was not conformable to his dignity. He answered them smiling, in a manner both playful and serious: "Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you for the care you take of my person, but really I do not see how my dress, as a religious, interferes with my dignity as archbishop. You well know that my authority and the duties of my charge are quite independent of my dress, and consist rather in taking care of the souls committed to me. But if, notwithstanding, you wish me to wear any other habit, I will cheerfully do so, provided you prove to me, that I do nothing by that contrary to the profession I have made."

One of his vicars having once found him in his chamber mending his stockings, was so surprised, that he exclaimed: "My lord, for eight or ten pence you might get this work done without giving yourself so much trouble." "My child, you know not what you say," replied he, "for I find the greatest consolation and joy in this

occupation, considering that the eight or ten pence which I save by this trifling work will be very useful to some poor man." Another time, as all the doors of his house were open during the day, there entered a poor man, with the design of begging something to help him to marry his daughter; but having watched him from afar, mending his clothes, he conceived a contempt for him; and thinking it was in vain to apply to him for relief, he was about to return without a word, when the saint, who had noticed him, called to him to inquire the object of his coming, and why he was going away without speaking to any one. "Do not be afraid," said he, "to tell me boldly what it is which has discouraged you." "My lord," replied the man, "I have a daughter to marry, and I have nothing to give her, if your lordship does not take pity on us." "Then," replied the saint, "you saw me mending my clothes, and you were going away without making your wishes known to me: this was not well. You must know that the very reason for my thus working with my own hands is, that I may save all that I can to give to you, and to all those who come to me in their sorrows, as to their father." Having, therefore, according to his usual custom, informed himself of the character and circumstances of this poor man, he assisted him and his, as he had requested.

SEVENTH DAY.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"Hearken, my dearest brethren, has not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him?" (b)—*The Apostle St. James.*

Blessed are the poor! Ah, how different to this is the language of the children of this world! The Athenians proposed to make laws, banishing the poor from their city, from their forum, and from their country fields, that the country might be altogether free from animals of this kind. And not only in Athens, but everywhere, poverty was looked upon for four thousand years as a dreadful evil, and a sign of malediction. And with the greater part of mankind this still continues to be the case, for wherever the influence of the Catholic Church has not become dominant, the same sentiments maintain their ground amongst men, and animate their actions.

Blessed are the poor in spirit! "He is rich in spirit," says St. Francis of Sales, "who has riches in his spirit, or his spirit in riches. He is poor in spirit who has neither riches in his spirit, nor his spirit in riches. There is a vast difference between having poison, and being poisoned. Apothecaries have almost all kinds of poison for their use, as circumstances may require, but they are not on that account

(a) Matt. v. 3. (b) Jame. ii. 5.

poisoned, because they keep their poisons not in their bodies but in their shops. In like manner you may possess riches without being poisoned by them, provided you have them for use, in your house or in your purse, and not by love in your heart."

The truly poor in spirit are said to be blessed because they are in a state wherein they desire nothing beyond what they have, which satiety is the highest temporal happiness; for happiness, accaccording to Boetius, does not consist in the fruition of a great many things, but in the accomplishment of our desires; or, as St. Austin says, "he is happy who has all he desires, and desires nothing but what he ought." The poor in spirit have a great advantage over the rich men of the world; for they have all they desire, because they desire nothing but what they have, and look upon what they have not as superfluous; whereas the rich are never satisfied, and their desires are boundless: "The covetous man shall never have his fill of money," (a) says Ecclesiastes. The reason is, because nothing here below can satisfy the heart of man; possession renders it rather uneasy than quiet. A covetous man is like one in a dropsy, the more he drinks the more he thirsts; and the miser's desire of having more, grows and increases with his riches. Let the wealth of a covetous man be ever so great, his wishes are still greater; he daily languishes after what he has not; and looking upon what he already has as nothing, he is always solicitous how to get more. His trouble, also, for what he has not, exceeds the pleasure what he has affords; and giving way to his insatiable desires,

(a) Eccles. v. 9.

he spends his days in care, and his years in anxiety and vain searches after what he can never obtain.

Alexander is said to have wept when he heard Anaxarchus's opinion that there were many worlds; and when asked the cause of his tears, he said: "Have I not sufficient reason to weep, since there are so many worlds, and I have not as yet conquered one?" The very idea of there being something wanting to his greatness damped the joy of all his success in war, and the pleasure of his vast extent of empire. On the contrary, Crates, though only master of a poor wallet and a cloak, was always merry and pleasant, and always looked as if every day had been a festival with him. He was richer and more content with his poor condition than Alexander with the empire of the world. This emperor happened once to meet Diogenes, and seeing him very poor, said he thought he was in great necessity, and therefore bid him ask what he pleased, and it should be granted him. The philosopher immediately replied: "Alexander, who do you think is more in want, you or I? I have nothing but my cloak and wallet, nor do I desire anything else; but you, though you are so great a prince, expose yourself to a thousand dangers to enlarge your dominions, and the whole world is not able to satisfy your ambition; be therefore assured that I am richer and happier than you." St. Basil says that Diogenes spoke very rationally; for, after all, who is richer; he who wants nothing, or he who wants many things? Certainly, the former. Diogenes wanted nothing, because he was content with what he had; but Alexander wanted, because he desired many

things, and consequently poor Diogenes was richer than Alexander the Great.

St. Chrysostom has a comparison well adapted to our purpose: "If a man," says he, "is so very thirsty that he is obliged to drink continually without being able to quench his thirst, shall we think him absolutely happy because he has at the same time plenty of water? By no means; for if we compare him to another, who has no thirst upon him, we should look upon the one as labouring under a dropsy, or a burning fever, and upon the other as a person in good health. The same difference is found between those whose thoughts are always employed in the pursuit of riches, and are never content with what they have, and the truly poor in spirit, who, satisfied with the little they enjoy, never seek after more. These are in perfect health, and the others are indisposed; these are truly rich in their poverty, and the others are really poor notwithstanding all their riches. This is what the Holy Ghost would have us understand by these words of Solomon: "There are some men who seem rich, yet have nothing; and others who seem poor, yet abound in riches."

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! This kingdom, which belongs especially to the poor in spirit as their own property, is, in the first place, the kingdom of Christ upon earth, namely, His holy church. It is said in Holy Scripture, that our Divine Redeemer was sent in a particular manner to preach the Gospel to the poor, and to heal the contrite of heart. And when St. John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Him whether He was the Christ, or whether they were to expect another,

our Blessed Saviour gave them this answer: "Go, and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind see, the dumb speak, the lepers are cleansed, the dead rise, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." And in truth, if we only reflect awhile, we shall find that the kingdom of God, or His church, belongs especially to the poor in spirit; for the more a man is detached from all affection to earthly goods, the better is he disposed to receive the blessings of this kingdom; because the more willingly does he listen to the words of truth, inviting him into the fold of Christ, the more readily does he yield to the call of Divine grace, the more docile is he to the inspirations of heaven; whereas the rich ones of the world, those who are wedded to the goods and pleasures of this life, are insensible to the lights and graces which are offered them, and listen with cold apathy and indifference to the most solemn truths of eternity. Hence we find, that the greater part of those, who in the early ages of the church, embraced the faith, were amongst the poor; so that the enemies of Christ proudly objected, as we read in the Gospel of St. John, to those who were struck with His divine wisdom: "Has any one of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in Him? But this multitude that knoweth not the law are accursed."(a)

And as the inestimable blessing of entering into the church of Christ appertains to the poor in spirit, so it also belongs especially to them to hold a distinguished position in this kingdom. Such is the eminent dignity of the poor in the

(a) John vii. 48, 49.

church, that Bossuet declares, that already, even in this world, by means of the church, God has partly fulfilled that sentence which will hereafter be fully accomplished, that the last shall be first, and the first last. In the world, the poor seem born only to serve the rich; on the contrary, the rich are only admitted into the church on condition of their serving the poor, for those that are last in the world are first in the church. "The church, therefore," says Bossuet, "may be called the city of the poor, as it is the city of God." To the poor was the Saviour sent, to the poor He preached his first sermon; it was the poor who first entered into the church, it was the poor whom God chose, that they might be rich in faith and heirs of His kingdom. St. Paul besought the brethren to pray for him, that the service which he was about to render to the poor, that is, the alms with which he was charged, might be agreeable to them.

But the blessing which the poor in spirit enjoy in the kingdom of Christ upon earth is only a faint shadow of that which they will enjoy in His glorious kingdom in heaven. St. Bernard makes an excellent remark upon those words of our Lord Jesus Christ, where He promises to the poor in spirit the kingdom of heaven: "Our divine Saviour," says he, "does not say that the kingdom of heaven shall be given to the poor in spirit, but that it is already theirs, because, though they do not enjoy it at present, it yet belongs to them as their own property; they have really purchased it by abandoning all they had in this world. If we give a sum of money for a jewel, but leave it for a time in the hands of the merchant, the jewel is still certainly ours, because

we have bought and paid for it, and so it is with the kingdom of heaven." "The kingdom of heaven," says our Saviour, "is like a merchant that seeks for fine pearls, who having found one of great value, goes and sells all he has to buy it." Now as this pearl belongs to the man who bought it with his money, so the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor, because they have bought it by the sale of all their goods.

"Heaven is promised," says St. Liguori, "to the other beatitudes only as a future reward. 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' But to the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is assigned as a present recompense, *for theirs* IS *the kingdom of heaven.* This is so, because to them who are truly poor in spirit, the Lord gives great helps, even in this life." Hence Cornelius a Lapide says, "that as by God's decree the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor, they have truly a full right to it."

EIGHTH DAY.

"Behold we have left all things, and have followed Thee: what, therefore, shall we have? And Jesus said to them: 'Amen I say to you, that you, who have followed Me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the seat of his Majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting.'" (*)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"The less we have here, the more we shall enjoy in God's kingdom, where the mansion of each is proportioned to the love with which he shall have imitated the life of Jesus Christ."—*St. Teresa.*

St. Jerome, St. Austin, and St. Gregory, commenting on these words of St. Peter, "Behold, we have left all things, and have followed Thee," make some excellent and useful remarks. "What great confidence," says St. Jerome, "does this manifest in St. Peter! Though he had been but a fisherman, always poor, living upon his trade, and getting his bread by the sweat of his brow, yet with great confidence he says, 'We have left all.'" "This he might very well do," says St. Gregory, "for we are not to consider the things he left, but the will with which he left them; he left a great deal who reserved nothing for himself." It is a great matter to quit all, though the things be very inconsiderable that we leave. For how easily are our passions chained to what we already have, and how earnestly we search after what we have not? It is for this reason that St. Peter

(*) Matt. xix. 27—29.

and St. Andrew left much, because they denied themselves even the desire and the pleasure of having anything at all. St. Austin is of the same opinion, and says, that the apostles even gloried that they had left all to follow Christ, because, upon His call, they had forsaken their nets and fishing-boat. And, in effect, he really despises and leaves everything, who quits and despises not only those things which he possessed, but all other things likewise to which his desires might have carried him. This is no small comfort for those who have forsaken only a little, because they had no more to forsake. This father also observes, when speaking of himself, and of the reward he hoped for, for having renounced and left all for Jesus Christ: "Though I have not been rich, I shall not have the less reward for that; for the apostles, whose example I have followed, were no richer than I; he leaves all the world who leaves all he has, and all desires of future possession."

St. Jerome, explaining our Saviour's answer to St. Peter, makes the following remark: "Observe here the Son of God does not merely say, 'Verily I say unto you, that you who have left all;' but he adds, 'you who have followed me;' for, to leave all is not here the essential part, since several heathen philosophers, as Diogenes, Antisthenes, and others, have done this." What, therefore, renders renunciation of earthly possessions truly valuable and meritorious in the sight of God, is not the mere external action, but the spirit by which it is done, namely, the sincere desire of living to God alone, and treading faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is to these that our Lord promises the hundredfold here upon earth, and life everlasting hereafter.

The same holy doctor, speaking of this hundred-fold, which Jesus Christ promises to bestow in this life upon those who divest themselves of earthly possessions for His sake, says, that he who shall forsake temporal goods for the love of our Saviour shall receive spiritual for them, which, being compared with the others, are as a hundred in respect of a small, inconsiderable number. But Cassian interprets it also of exterior and visible goods, and says, in conformity to the words of St. Mark, that Religious receive this hundred-fold even in this life; and truly, religious men leave their home and family for the love of Christ; and, in place of these, God gives them many houses, and blesses them with the society of many friends in Jesus Christ. They forsake father and mother, and God gives them a great many other fathers, who love them much more tenderly, take more care of them, and are much more solicitous for their good than their carnal parents. They quit their brothers in the world, and God gives them other brethren, who love them more sincerely, because their love, arising from God and having God alone in view, is free from self-interest. But although what is here stated by Cassian and other spiritual writers be true, yet it must be acknowledged that the full and perfect reward, which is promised and will be granted to those who divest themselves of earthly possessions to follow Christ, is something much greater, infinitely greater, than what we can enjoy here upon earth, for it is an infinite treasure the possession of eternal life, the possession of an infinite good which comprehends in itself all other goods. "O happy exchange," cries St. John Chrysostom, "where clay is given away and gold

received. O happy traffic, in which we renounce the wretched goods of this earth, and receive, in exchange, the treasures of glory and eternal life!"

The promise of eternal life made by Christ to those who abandon their earthly goods to follow Him has most powerfully stimulated the saints to despise from their hearts all worldly pomp, and to imitate as closely as possible the poverty of their crucified Saviour. The venerable Mary Margaret Alocoque practised holy poverty with such perfection, that she was never known to be discontented with what was given her, either in dress, food, or furniture, but she received with gratitude whatever was provided for her, both in sickness and in health, regarding it as something belonging to Christ; and whenever she was in want of anything, she bore the privation in peace, saying, that it became the state of poverty to want the comforts of life, and that the wish of those who of themselves have embraced poverty through love of Jesus Christ is to delight in experiencing the inconveniences and difficulties of that condition. "It is not to be truly poor," she added, "to make a vow of poverty, and want for nothing."

We read of the Blessed Peter Claver, that everything about his person and in his mode of life breathed poverty. His bed was but a hide or mat, spread on the floor; his furniture consisted of his instruments of penance, two rough wooden seats, a little stool for any one who came to see him, a table, on which he kept his breviary, which served him all his life, and two volumes of cases of conscience. As for all other books, he went to consult them in the library whenever he needed them. The ornaments corresponded with the furniture;

a crucifix, coarsely painted, between two pictures, one representing our Lord at the column of flagellation—the other, St. Peter on his knees, weeping for his infidelity; a wooden cross at the head of his bed, and above it a picture of blessed Rodriguez: such was the decoration of his room.

Anxious for all that could assimilate him to his Divine model, this holy father generally made use of what others had rejected; his biretta always served him ten years, and even then he would not have a new one; his waistcoat consisted of four pieces of coarse cloth, tied together with bits of string; as for his cloak, it was wonderful how it lasted so long, considering the many different purposes to which it was applied; moreover, it was patched all over. One day the superior having obliged him to take a new cassock, he looked so embarrassed, and even distressed, that out of very compassion the old one was restored to him. He never took a whole candle, contenting himself with odd ends, picked up here and there; he only wrote on the backs of letters, or on remnants of paper thrown aside; his pens corresponded with his paper, and were mended as best he could. In the same spirit, he usually ate the bits of bread collected after meals, and was delighted to eat out of the same dish with the poor, who, next to the sick, had the greatest share of his kindness. It often happened when he returned home, fasting and exhausted with fatigue, he found no dinner, because the cook had forgotten him. So far from complaining, he always excused the brother, saying it was entirely his own fault in not being at home in due time. Some one, however, moved with compassion at seeing him thus neglected, wanted to

inform the superior of it. "Oh, no! I beg you will not!" said the holy man; "besides, what is there to complain of? How many others pass not only a single morning, but even several days, without bread?"

NINTH DAY.

"It is not mere poverty, but the love of poverty, which is reputed virtue."—*St. Bernard.*

"Many religious glory in the name of poverty, but shun the sufferings and humiliations which are attached to it. They glory in the name, but fly from the reality."—*St. Vincent Ferrer.*

THE saints teach, that what constitutes the excellence and merit of holy poverty, is, first, detachment of the heart from earthly possessions; and secondly, a relish for those things which make poverty practically felt. As to the first, it is clear, that true Christian poverty does not consist so much in depriving ourselves of earthly goods, as in cutting off and destroying all vicious affection to them. That a person may be truly said to leave all things and to follow Christ, it is not sufficient that he renounces externally his worldly goods; but he must absolutely detach his affection from them, otherwise, he will only transplant them out of the world into religion; because, in this case, he will only change the affections he had for riches in the world, to the affection for riches in religion. Cassian mourns over the state of those religious who allow such

affections to grow in their hearts, however trifling the object. "I am at a loss," says he, "how to speak of that childish weakness of some religious, who, after bidding adieu to what they had in the world, fall in love with trifles in religion, and seek their little conveniences with the greatest solicitude; so that their inclinations are sometimes more violently bent upon these trifles, than they were before upon the riches they had in the world. What does it signify to these men to have left great possessions, if they have not also left all irregular desires towards them? By retaining a desire and an inclination to little things, since they cannot aim higher at present, they discover too clearly that they have not quite destroyed their former passions, but only changed their objects. Their care and anxiety is still the same, yet they make little or no account thereof, as if the object, and not the disorder in the affections, were that which makes avarice a crime. They are of opinion, that we may leave great things, to fix our affections upon those that are less; but they are in error, for we renounce the greater, in order that we may despise smaller things with greater ease."

"We religious," says St. Bernard, "are the most miserable of all men, if we permit things of so little consequence to do us so much harm; for what blindness, or rather, what folly and madness is it to set our hearts thus shamefully upon trifles, after we have renounced things far more considerable? For, if we have renounced all earthly possessions, all carnal love to our parents, and voluntarily confined ourselves within the walls of a monastery—if we have come to religion to deny our own wills, and freely submit

to another's in everything, what should we not do to preserve the merit of these good actions, and never forfeit it by any folly or negligence?"

In the second place, the *love* of poverty requires a relish for the *practice* of poverty, a feeling of pleasure when any opportunity occurs of suffering the inconveniences which poverty brings with it. Men of the world, who live in the midst of comforts, must ever keep their hearts detached from what they possess; but religious must go farther: besides being detached from earthly possessions, they must relish those things which are attached to the profession of holy poverty; they must feel a pleasure when deprived of the comforts of this world; they must be satisfied with necessaries. If we look at the lives of the saints of God, we shall find that they were all, more or less, animated by this spirit, even though placed in the highest and most honourable stations in life. Look, for example, at that great model of virtue, St. Charles Borromeo. We see from his life, that when he was archbishop of Milan, and cardinal, he was surrounded by many attendants, lived in a magnificent palace, and received a large income. But, in his manner of living, he was the greatest lover of poverty, and he practised it in all that regarded himself, for he made choice of one of the poorest rooms in the palace for his private apartment, and furnished it in the simplest and humblest manner, with that only which was necessary. His food and clothing, too, was such as was suited to the poor. Whilst every comfort and convenience was carefully provided for all else in his palace, he himself lived in the greatest poverty, thus giving us a bright example of a true relish for holy poverty,

even amidst the greatest abundance. Such must be the conduct of a good religious; his love of holy poverty must make him satisfied with what is merely necessary; and when some opportunity occurs of suffering through holy poverty, he must rejoice, since this becomes his holy profession. If he is sometimes sent by obedience to give missions, or on some other work of charity, and meets with every comfort and convenience in lodging, food, &c., he is indeed allowed to make use of these with holy discretion, but, in his own interior, he ought to keep himself detached from them, and to feel a longing to return to his own home and the practice of poverty.

The holy fathers of the desert were especially careful to train up their subjects in the practice of this virtue, watching every opportunity in order to infuse into their hearts a sincere love of holy poverty. Thus St. Dorotheus acted with his disciple St. Dositheus, who, following his direction, attained to the highest degree of interior poverty. An instance of the means he used to train him in the indifference which belongs to poverty was the following: he gave him a habit to make up for himself, and then took it from him to bestow it upon another, after he had taken a great deal of pains with it. Practices conformable to this are observed at present in several religious societies, where the fervour of religion and the spirit of piety reign.

TENTH DAY.

"The Lord is become a refuge for the poor, a helper in time of tribulation." (s)—*Holy David.*

"We, whoever we be, who come to the battle of faith, have to maintain a contest with the evil spirit; and the evil spirit has nothing personally his own in this world. We, therefore, should be naked, as we have to contend with the naked; for if one who is clothed wrestle with one who is naked, he is quickly thrown to the ground, since he may be held by his clothes. Now every earthly possession is but a sort of garment for the body, and, therefore, he who hastens to contend with the devil, should throw aside these garments, lest he be borne down."—*St. Gregory.*

When persons go to war against their enemies, they leave all useless or unnecessary things at home; they are careful not to encumber themselves with things that will delay them on their march, or impede them in the pursuit of their foes; they take such things only as will aid them in securing the victory, such things as will leave them unshackled in their movements, and allow them to make vigorous and sudden attacks. The same must we do in our warfare with our spiritual enemies, if we would gain the victory; we must fight naked with our naked enemies, for the more perfectly we cast aside all earthly encumbrances, the more we detach ourselves from this wretched world and the delights of the flesh, the more valiantly shall we fight against our spiritual enemies, and the more certain shall we be of victory. Thus the first Christians, by divesting themselves of worldly goods, rose

(s) Psalm ix. 10.

superior to all the persecutions of their enemies, and stood firm under the severest trials; nothing could shake their constancy, or separate them from their holy faith; they boldly resisted unto blood, and laid down their lives for their heavenly Master.

A beautiful fact, related in the Chronicles of St. Francis of Assisium, shows how much the practice of perfect poverty enables us to resist and subdue our enemies: "Brother Leo," says the Chronicle, "on one occasion had a vision whilst at prayer, in which he seemed to behold numbers of friars passing over a river. Some of them were laden with heavy burdens, seeking to carry over on their shoulders many different things which they had collected; but scarcely had they reached the middle of the torrent, when they sunk, overpowered by their burdens, and perished in the current. Others he saw entered the stream with much smaller burdens, yet they, too, though enabled to advance further in the passage, miserably perished before they could gain the opposite bank, being entangled and overpowered by what they attempted to carry with them. Others, in fine, the holy man saw, who entered the stream with nothing but their religious habits, wholly disencumbered, these easily and happily reached the further shore." Brother Leo having named the vision to St. Francis, the holy father explained it thus: "The first, who were laden with large heavy burdens, represent those who, having entered religion, do not give up from their hearts their worldly goods, but remain attached to things of the world; they attempt to pass through the stream of life encumbered with many cares: these quickly perish. The second, who attempted to

pass the river with lighter burdens, represent those who fix their affections on many little things, who do not practise poverty in its purity and perfection, and so are gradually entangled in the snares of the enemy, and end likewise by losing their immortal souls. But the third class —those who cross the stream of life detached from all things, and adhering strictly to holy poverty—proceed without difficulty, and easily overcome the impetuosity of the stream: these happily reach the harbour of eternal rest, the true land of promise."

St. Chrysostom, inquiring into the causes of the zeal and fervour of the primitive church, and the torpidity and remissness of Christians in his days, agrees with St. Gregory in the reason he assigns for it, saying that the former deprived themselves of their goods to fight naked against the devil, but the latter fight in their clothes; that is, they are charged with plenty and riches, which are very prejudicial to them in the combat. A man strips when he would wrestle; he who wishes to swim over a river takes off his clothes; and he who journeys on foot, walks much easier when he has nothing to carry. Deeply impressed with this truth, the saints had nothing more at heart than to detach themselves entirely from all affection to earthly goods, and to follow their crucified Lord in the practice of perfect poverty. St. Francis of Sales used to visit his diocese on foot, and never encumbered himself with luggage; he also chose the meanest cottage for his resting-place; and, after his various fatigues, was frequently reduced to the necessity of sleeping on straw. These inconveniences never affected him, except as far as they were felt by his attendants

—this was the only source of his uneasiness; for, to any comments upon the bad accommodations which he often found, or the inconveniences which he was obliged to suffer, he answered with a holy joy, that he had never yet met with a lodging as incommodious as the stable of Bethlehem, nor with a bed so rough as that of the cross. He also added, that the poor people, who furnished him with accommodations, were not lodged more commodiously; and that the best method of inducing them to support their poverty with patience, was to partake of it with them, and to teach them by example, which is always more powerful than words, that their state does not present those terrors which imagination might picture. Thus the holy prelate excited himself to suffer the inconveniences of life by the example of our Redeemer, and the lot of a large portion of mankind whom Providence has destined to lead a poor and laborious life. "They are men like ourselves," said he; "they are Christians called to grace and to glory; they are enabled like us to call God their father; they are our brethren, and, perhaps, better and more holy than ourselves, more agreeable to God, and destined to a greater share of glory. Why, therefore, should we make such a difference between them and ourselves? Why should we think ourselves degraded, and objects of compassion, because, for the space of some days, we experience those hardships which they are doomed to endure for their whole lives?"

ELEVENTH DAY.

"Be not afraid when a man shall be made rich, and when the glory of his house shall be increased; for when he shall die, he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him." (a)—*Holy David.*

"We brought nothing into this world, and certainly we can carry nothing out. But having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

Nothing is more unbecoming religious persons, who have embraced a life of mortification and penance, than to be ever seeking after worldly comforts and conveniences, and never satisfied with necessaries. The saints, who were truly animated by the spirit of God, acted far differently, for they not only rejected all superfluities, but even endeavoured to be satisfied with as little as possible in such things as nature absolutely requires. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi could not bear to hear anything in the house found fault with, however simple or mean it might be, whether it were clothes, food, rooms, or anything else; but would say, "The meaner things are, the more we should esteem them, and seek to have them, for we have made profession of poverty, and everything seems precious to the poor, who know well that rich and valuable things do not belong to them." This rule she observed most perfectly in her own case, highly prizing whatever was abject and mean, and greatly valuing the least thing given her by the community. This holy mother desired intensely that all the nuns should feel love for holy poverty,

(a) Ps. xlviii. 17, 18. (b) 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8.

and especially endeavoured to implant it in her subjects, striving to detach them from all things, though she was very careful in providing them with necessaries. Amongst other practices to secure this, she often went to examine the little altars of the novices, and when she found anything superfluous, she took it away, saying, that poverty and superfluity were incompatible. When she saw any one in the slightest degree attached to anything given her for her use, she took it away, and, if necessary, gave her something else in exchange. She felt indescribable pleasure when a novice parted willingly with whatever she was asked for; but if she saw one inclined to vanity in new habits, she caused old ones to be given her. One of her subjects having had a black veil assigned to her use, which was not to her taste, would not make it up. On seeing this, the good mother gave her so sharp a reproof as effectually to deliver her from the worldly fancy of veils to her taste, and then ordered her to come at a time specified, and beg her, for the love of God, to give her the oldest and most shabby veil to be found in the noviciate. When she found any one who complained of the food being ill-dressed, and who did not esteem the simple and mean things of the community, she reproved her, saying, "Remember that you profess poverty; and the poor, when they beg, are well pleased if they can get a scrap of bread."

Though the saint wished the community most tenderly to consider the sick, yet she also wished that the vow of poverty should shine in the food, the apartments, and everything else belonging to the sick in the Infirmary, and that there should be a marked distinction between a sick nun and

a sick secular. She gave, in her illnesses, a most perfect and lively example of this virtue of poverty. She wished her daughters to enter deeply into the nobility of holy religious poverty, to which God Himself is given in reward; and she said sometimes, "Then, sisters, may we truly call ourselves nuns of Santa Maria degli Angeli, when, being fatigued and weary, we get reproofs and disciplines, instead of refreshment."

In a rapture, which she had on the night of Pentecost, 1585, speaking of religious poverty, she said to Jesus, "Blessed are they who purely follow Thee, without possessing anything transitory, seeing that, for their reward, they will possess Thee, who art the Treasure of all treasures, the Wealth of all wealths, the Infinite Wealth of Paradise! Where shall we find the purchase-money? what are we to give in exchange for such a good? Oh, who would believe it? Nothing, nothing is demanded, but for the love of God to possess nothing, to desire nothing in this world, to want nothing but God. 'Dominus pars hæreditatis meæ.' I say more, that we only desire God for Himself. O most rich and excellent poverty! The poor are they who have the purchase-money of Paradise in their hands, for its treasures are to be bought with perfect poverty, and the greater the soul's poverty the more does God fill her with His treasures, by which she can purchase Paradise. Oh, who would not love this poverty, which obtains for us such great gifts from God! 'Beati pauperes spiritu, &c. Quam dilecta tabernacula tua Domine virtutum, concupiscit et deficit anima mea,' I say, in the desire of possessing poverty, which is worth Heaven to me, since Thou willest that with this I should purchase

Heaven, and the price is sufficient for so great a kingdom."

When she heard that some careless religious, who, being scantily provided for, complained that the community did not give them suitable clothes and other conveniences, she exclaimed, with sobs and sighs, "Oh, the blindness of creatures! O religious state, how little art thou known! O the misery of those, who would cloak their own evil with that which is truly good! This is the ruin of many souls! These deluded ones think to find merit in their works, and will find eternal condemnation, since amidst the discomforts of poverty they have had a voluntary propriety!" She used also to say, that the religious, who dresses and lives without wanting anything but what is provided for her by the community and superiors, is sure of salvation; and that, on the contrary, the salvation of that religious is hopeless who is a voluntary proprietor, and is ever eager after good fare, though she may dress meanly and seek to stifle her conscience by her poor habit. Such a one deceives herself, and, as she has not the courage to divest herself of all things, there is no Heaven for her.

One Sunday, when the choir was singing vespers, she was rapt in ecstacy, and the Lord showed her a great number of religious, who were sinking like thunderbolts into the depths of hell; and she understood that they had been chiefly condemned for not observing their vow of poverty. In her exclamation, she used these words: "O poverty, O religious poverty, how little art thou known and observed! Oh, wert thou known and observed, cells would not be so full of ornament; the holding and spending

money at pleasure would be abhorred as poison; and many other pomps and vanities, unbecoming a true religious, would be banished from the cloisters! O, my Jesus, how is the beauty of religious poverty deformed by cursed propriety! O how many religious souls burn in hell for not having valued the observance of holy poverty! O accursed propriety, which has so many excuses and devices, and which so often makes that appear good which is in reality a fault and a vice."

Another time she exclaimed, "O happy religious, who are so much honoured by God, that their portion will be God Himself, since by solemn vow they have left all for God! O rich poverty, which makest us possessors of the Supreme Good! But, on the contrary, woe to such religious as retain anything by an act of self-appropriation, dealing with it, as those who have no obligation! Alas! acting thus, they reject God, who is their portion, holding that which is not Him, in violation of their promises made to Him. God grant that, after death, when the examination shall take place, they may not be rejected by Him, and eternally separated from the Supreme Good! O poor religious, so blind to their state."

St. Ignatius of Loyola bore a most tender devotion to holy poverty. The Scriptures, the Breviary, and the book of the Imitation of Christ, formed his whole library; the furniture of his room, as Bartoli says, was no other than what was provided by the Sunamite in the chamber of the prophet Eliseus—a little bed, a table, a chair, and a candlestick; and both chair and table were of wood, and without covering. He said, that he

only considered a man really poor in spirit, when he had no more affection to the things he made use of than a statue would have for its clothing. He commanded that all should be prepared to go begging from door to door, when necessity or obedience required. Those who asked admission into the society were to be told that their clothing and beds would be poor, and that they certainly were to expect the worst in the house.

St. Francis of Assisi was most particular in the matter of holy poverty with his religious, and took the greatest care to prevent even its slightest violation. It is related, in the chronicles of his order, that Father Elias, one of the chief fathers of the institute, once presented himself to Francis in a habit made of better cloth than those of the other brethren, with a cowl that was longer and sleeves wider, and he himself assuming an air little suitable to his profession. Francis, dissembling what was passing in his mind, said to him, before the other religious: "I beg you to lend me that habit." Elias did not dare refuse, and, going aside, took it off and brought it to him. Francis then put it on over his own, smoothed it down, plaited it nicely under the girdle, threw the cowl over his head, and, strutting proudly with his head erect, paced three or four times round the apartment, saying, in a loud voice, "God preserve you, good people." Then taking the habit off indignantly, he threw it from him with contempt, and, turning to Elias, "That is the way," he said, "that the bastard brethren of our order will strut." After this he resumed his usual demeanour, and walked humbly round in his old and tattered habit, saying, "Such is the deportment of the true Friars Minor." Then,

seating himself amongst them, he addressed them in the mildest manner, on poverty and humility, the perfection of which he so forcibly demonstrated, that it seemed to them that those whom they had previously considered most poor and humble, had really made but small advance in these virtues. In fine, he annulled all the novelties which the vicar-general Elias had introduced during his absence.

Again, St. Francis Borgia, though cradled in luxury, bore a marked affection to holy poverty when he forsook the world. His habit, his diet, his chamber and bed, were of the poorest. Poverty appeared even in the very paper he used to write his sermons on, in the fire which was made sometimes for him in his greatest necessity, and in a thousand other things like to these. He came to such perfection of poverty, that he could not be prevailed upon to change his shoes and stockings; and once, his old stockings being taken away, and a pair of new ones put in their place, without his knowledge, he obliged them to bring the old ones back again. When he went begging, he chose rather to eat of the scraps of bread he brought home with him, than of the loaves that were laid on the table. In travelling, he often came to his lodging wet and shivering with cold, and it was an extraordinary joy to him when, even under these circumstances, he met with no manner of convenience or comfort. When sick, and the weather extremely cold, he would never allow anything to be put about his bed or in his chamber which might keep the wind from him. Nay, he deemed a little mat, which was fastened to the head of his bed, to be too great a delicacy; all this, the high state he had forsaken in the world made more admirable.

TWELFTH DAY.

"Choose for the companions of thy life poverty, contempt, and suffering; because these were the chosen companions of Jesus Christ."—*Venerable Da Ponte.*

"Let poverty be loved as the most firm bulwark of religion, and kept as strictly as possible, by the help of Divine grace."—*St. Ignatius.*

The church of God is a spiritual kingdom, founded by our Divine Redeemer with his blood; it is a kingdom which shall exist throughout all ages, for though heaven and earth shall pass away, yet the church of God shall never fail; it shall triumph over all its enemies, shall surmount all obstacles, and shall give glory to God throughout eternity. This great kingdom, as here militant, has its towers and fortresses, which serve to strengthen it, and its chosen garrisons and select battalions to support and defend it; these trusty legions are especially religious orders, which must be considered a strong and most important subsidy, which Almighty God has raised, from time to time, to defend His church from the enemies that assailed her, and to add to her beauty. This truth is sufficiently evident, from the vision of Pope Honorius, who saw the great church of Lateran falling, but supported, in the critical juncture, by two holy men, St. Dominic and St. Francis, the founders of those two religious orders which bear their names, and which have in succeeding ages afforded very great assistance to the church.

The great armies of the church's chosen and

sworn soldiers in religion have their own particular bulwarks and ramparts to support and strengthen themselves against their enemies, and to enable them the better to serve the church of Christ. The principal wall or bulwark of religious orders is holy poverty, according to the testimony of all those holy men who have been raised by God to establish these religious bodies, and to guide men in the path of perfection. In temporal kingdoms and fortresses, riches are looked upon as a principal source of strength and power; the more wealthy a kingdom is, the more invincible it is considered: but it is not so in religion; here, it is not the abundance of earthly riches that gives strength, but the utter abandonment and renunciation of them; here, to overcome the enemies that assail us, we must fight against them naked, that is, detached from all things. St. Chrysostom says, that religion is a great and all-important undertaking, to succeed in which, we must renounce all things, for thus only shall we possess a sufficient stock of materials to complete the tower of perfection; thus only shall we be able to overcome the numerous enemies that surround us.

Poverty is called by the saints, the wall or bulwark of religion, for several reasons. *In the first place*, the wall of a fortress *gives courage* and confidence to all that dwell within it; as long as this wall remains firm and unbroken, they fear not the threats or weapons of the enemy without, but boldly and courageously repel all his attacks; but if this their rampart begins to give way—if breach after breach is made in their fortifications—they lose courage, and fight with less boldness. It is so with holy poverty in

religion: as long as this wall of poverty stands firm and unshaken, the members of religious bodies despise all the attacks of their spiritual enemies; they run with confidence along the path of Christian perfection; they fear no dangers; they overcome all obstacles: but if this bulwark begin to fall—if the shield of poverty be broken down—the heart becomes weak and timid; the love of earthly goods having entered, the once noble and chosen soldiers of Jesus become a prey to their enemies, instead of a terror to them; they fly from the very shadows of self-denial and mortification.

In the second place, the wall of a fortress, as long as it stands firm and unbroken, *keeps all enemies at a distance*, and allows them not to enter the camp!—so it is with holy poverty: as long as the wall of poverty continues strong and firm, so long will the spirit of the world and its corrupt maxims, the great enemies of religion, be excluded from the house of God, and the spirit of God and his heavenly wisdom will flourish in her courts. We have a proof of this in the history of the Order of St. Francis. This Order was founded on the most perfect poverty; and as long as this virtue flourished in its first purity and fervour, so long did the Order increase and multiply; even in the lifetime of the saint, there were more than five thousand religious, who assembled at one time, at a chapter which he summoned; but afterwards, when they began to relax in the perfection of poverty, disorders gradually entered amongst them, so that general reforms were several times necessary; and amongst the various reformed branches of this great Order, it is clear to all inquirers, that those which have

adhered most strictly to perfect poverty have flourished most, and produced most saints; whilst those lax in poverty have but few members, and exhibit few signs of extraordinary sanctity.

In the third place, the bulwarks of a fortress enable those who dwell therein to *keep* all their *property secure, and to increase it:* in the same way the wall of holy poverty incloses the fortress of religion, and as long as it remains unbroken, the members will be enabled to persevere and advance in virtue, for holy poverty is a great help to humility, as riches are the excitement to pride. Poverty assists in the practice of mortification, both exterior—in privation of worldly conveniences—and interior, in the obligation to ask leave for everything. It enables us, also, to practise chastity, by removing many temptations to which the rich of this world are continually exposed. It gives an opportunity, too, of practising charity; *towards men,*—since, when perfectly disengaged from earthly objects, a person is far more ready to enter upon any office of charity which Providence may call him to, riches being heavy chains which tie men to particular places and countries; *towards God,*—since the heart, when detached from earthly objects, is free to attend to Him alone, and to fix all its affections upon heavenly treasures.

As long as the wall of a fortress remains strong and entire, they who dwell within it live in peace and security; so in religion: as long as holy poverty is maintained in its purity, each one will enjoy that peace which the world cannot give—the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding; each one will increase in love and attachment to his holy vocation, and so will

never be disturbed by any trouble of mind, but will rejoice under trials and afflictions; each one will be enabled to pray with greater recollection and devotion, being free from all anxiety about temporal concerns; and fixing his mind and heart wholly on God in holy prayer, he will enjoy sweet and undisturbed communication with heaven.

Deeply convinced of this truth, the blessed Paul of the Cross used to call holy poverty "the invincible rampart of his congregation." When he spoke of it, it was with ardent zeal, and he used to call it his beloved virtue; he sometimes exclaimed, "Oh, what a happiness is community life!" and he often said, "In a community life we have a great treasure:" and as he who loves anything ardently, fears to be deprived of it, this servant of God feared the slightest fault against holy poverty, and watched against every approach of danger. With great zeal and fervour, he prohibited the religious from keeping anything superfluous in their cells, and still more did he take particular care that no eatables should be kept there: it is not possible to describe his earnestness in recommending superiors to attend to this. And that poverty in this might be perpetuated, he expressly inserted an injunction in the rules, forbidding even the principal superiors to keep such things in their rooms. "Oh," said he, "how necessary is the attention of superiors to this, for on it much depends." That religious may be said truly and practically to love poverty, besides keeping their heart detached from worldly goods, they must: First, not appropriate anything to themselves, unless they have received it from the superior. This is absolutely

necessary to the practice of true religious poverty, and the neglect of it is always a violation of that holy virtue; for, by profession, they have renounced all right, dominion, and authority over everything, and therefore can only use what they receive from their superiors.

Secondly, they must be satisfied with a mere supply for their necessities, not asking anything from superiors that they do not absolutely require, either for themselves, or for the due fulfilment of their official duties.

Thirdly, they must be careful in their mode of using such necessary things as are assigned to them by superiors, being ever watchful that nothing intrusted to them be wasted, spoiled, or injured through their negligence; such consumption would be a most grievous fault against holy poverty, for everything in religion belongs to God, and, consequently, must be used with the care that becomes things consecrated to Him.

Fourthly, each one must be diligent in his work and the duties of his office, fulfilling them with fidelity and fervour, in order to assist the community by his labour. It is by this industry of the members, and their ardour in accomplishing the works assigned to them, that superiors should be enabled to provide for the wants of the community, and to extend their charity to others; whereas, if idleness creep into the house, it must prove a great obstacle to the practice of charity, and fatally undermine the spirit of poverty and religious perfection.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"Poverty should be the badge of religious; and, as men of the world distinguish their property by stamping it with their names, so the works of religious should be known to be such by the mark of holy poverty."—*St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi.*
"We ought to love poverty as a mother, and rejoice at the opportunity of feeling its effects."—*St. Ignatius.*

Poverty is called by St. Ignatius, the Mother of Religious, because it does for religious what a mother does for her children. In the first place, as it is by our earthly mothers that we are born to a natural life, so poverty brings forth religious to the religious life. This is evident from the words of Christ, to the rich young man whom He taught perfection. "Go," said He, "sell what thou hast, and give it to the poor, and come, follow Me." Clearly showing, that to become perfect, we must detach ourselves from all the things of this world, and must even divest ourselves of our earthly goods. Again, enumerating the virtues which are peculiarly blessed, He places poverty at the head of all, saying first, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Again; an earthly mother, after having given life to her child, takes care to nourish and cherish him in the way that may best enable him to become strong, and to acquire every natural good till he arrives at manhood: in like manner, poverty, having introduced us into religion, exerts all her power to make us increase and become strong in the spiritual life. She helps us to gain the most solid virtues, such as humility, chastity, charity, and the like.

Thirdly. An earthly mother bestows all that she has to provide for the wants and necessities of her child; she shares her all with him, and her possessions form the inheritance of her son; his very happiness is her joy. Such is poverty to the religious: as a tender mother, she provides for all the wants of her followers, and that in the most plentiful and wonderful manner, not only for this life, but also for the next. In this life—for our Saviour expressly promises "a hundred fold here upon earth, to all who leave temporal possessions, and follow Him!" "This is as a natural consequence of abandoning all things for Christ's sake," says St. Jerome, "for he who quits earthly goods to follow Christ, shall receive in return spiritual gifts, which, in comparison with temporal possessions, are as a hundred to one." St. Augustine extends it to temporal goods also, and says that he shall find such an abundant compensation for all that he has left for Christ, that he may say with St. Paul, "having nothing, he yet possesses all things." In the world, men must undergo great fatigue and constant anxiety, in order to preserve or increase their property, but religious have not to trouble themselves about it; they have only to attend to their various duties, and all these things are added unto them: and truly, poverty, besides providing for their temporal wants, also secures to religious eternal riches in the life to come; it prepares for them the crown of unfading glory in the kingdom of heaven; for Christ, after having promised the hundred fold, assures those who follow Him of the possession of heaven, declaring, that the less they retain to themselves here, and the more they are detached from earthly things, the more

abundantly shall they be rewarded in the life to come; they shall even sit with the apostles at the last day to judge the world; for, although these words are directly spoken to the apostles, yet, as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Thomas teach, they are applicable also to those who, like them, abandon all things, and embrace holy poverty to follow Christ. This is a privilege which will not be granted to all the elect, but only to such as become truly poor like the apostles.

Thus, poverty, like a loving mother, secures the happiness and prosperity of such as adhere to her, and consequently we ought to love and cherish her as such; but how shall we be able to do this?

First, by loving her *with a love of preference.* A child who truly loves his mother is far more attached to her than to any one else, however great, rich, or powerful she may be. The child of a poor peasant loves more fondly his humble parent, than he does the richest princess upon earth; he is miserable if separated from her. Oh, that we thus loved holy poverty! then should we prefer our own blessed abode in religion, poor and humble though it be, before the most gorgeous palace of an earthly king; then should we feel far greater delight to pass our lives in God's holy sanctuary, than to spend a thousand years in the tabernacles of sinners, though adorned with the richest gems of earth, and abounding with every delight.

Secondly,—with a love of union and conformity. A child who sincerely loves his mother would always be glad to carry some mark or badge by which he might be known to be her son, and

would glory in bearing some resemblance or likeness to her; so ought we to be glad to be recognized as poor religious, as persons who possess nothing, who cannot dispose of or receive the least thing, without permission from superiors; this is certainly very hard, and painful to human nature; yet, if we truly love our good mother, we ought to glory in being known as her humble children, despising all that the world may think or say: such was the love which the saints bore to this virtue. St. Liguori loved it to such a degree, that all who were acquainted with him were filled with admiration. From his appointment to the bishopric of St. Agatha, with the exception of the episcopal vestments, which he made use of when he officiated, he always wore the habit of his congregation, which was most dear to him, from its humble and poor appearance. "He actually had no other clothes than those on his back," said Rubini, the grand vicar; "and these were old and patched." One day, when Don John Baptist Puoti went to see him, he found him clothed in violet; and believing that he must therefore be going out, said to him, "Are you going to celebrate any function?" "No," replied his lordship; "but my cassock is being mended." He once passed the Dominican fathers of Darazzano, dressed in an old gown, full of patches, and in a cassock, which was out at the elbows; on seeing him in this state, Father Enati compassionated his great poverty; but his lordship excused himself, by frankly saying, that he had given a commission for clothing to be bought for him at Naples, at the old clothes-shop, and that he had not yet received it. He had a cassock, which was so bad, that the lay-

brother who accompanied him was ashamed of it; and as he had not the courage to tell him so, he resolved to take it away from him during the night, and to give him a new one of the same kind; the next morning, while he was assisting him to dress, which Alphonso could not do alone, on account of an issue in his arm, the brother adroitly substituted the new habit. His lordship did not find it out at first, but on looking at the sleeves, he saw that they were new: "Ah!" he said to him, "you have put new sleeves." "Yes;" answered the brother, "the others were too much torn." His lordship said no more, but some time afterwards, he saw that it was not his old cassock at all. "I am master," said he, raising his voice; "I think this cassock is perfectly new." "So it is," replied the brother; "the other was no longer decent enough for you to put on." "Never mind," said his lordship, in a tone of authority; "go, and fetch me the old cassock." "If you will not have this one," said the brother to him, "you must do without any, for the other has been given to the poor." This his lordship regretted, and reproved the brother for his freedom.

His bed was of coarse workmanship, and he had no curtains; the sheets were of coarse linen; his blanket, which he used in winter, was one of coarse wool, like those of the poor, and it was also old and thin; but, however severe the cold might be, he never allowed another to be brought, nor would he have a counterpane, but spread his cloak and cassock on the bed.

Don Dominic Spota, who was grand chanter of the cathedral of Girgenti, and several times vicar capitular, went to visit him at Arienzo, and

gave the following details in a letter which he wrote to Father Blasucci: "I have admired Naples. I have felt admiration for the magnificence of Rome, but the life of Mgr. Liguori has made a much greater impression upon me; it has effaced all the beauties of these two capitals from my eyes; I have seen a saintly bishop of the primitive ages; he lies on a bed, to which he is confined by the most painful infirmities, but his serene countenance betokens the tranquillity of his soul. The glory of God, and the government of his diocese, occupy him unceasingly; in him have I seen extreme moderation in sleep and in food, and such absolute poverty, that the only blanket he has on his straw bed is his cassock; his pastoral ring would not excite the envy of a beggar, a false stone is its only ornament; his cross equals it in its simplicity."

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"O voluntary poverty, how blessed art thou, possessing nothing; thou art always cheerful, always abounding, because thou turnest to advantage every inconvenience!"—*St. Lawrence Justinian.*

"Oh! how great is the happiness of a religious, who desires, and possesses, nothing upon earth; he enjoys true peace, a blessing more valuable than all worldly goods; for earthly goods can never content a soul destined to be made happy only by the possession of God."—*St. Liguori.*

It is related in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, that the Bishop of Sinigaglia, seeing the extreme poverty practised by him and his companions,

could not help telling him, that he thought the mode of life he had chosen was too hard and painful: "As for me," replied the holy man, "I find it still harder, and more painful, to possess anything; for one cannot take care of property without much solicitude and embarrassment. Law-suits ensue, and sometimes, people are even obliged to take up arms in its defence, and all this extinguishes the love of God and of our neighbour." The bishop approved of his remarks, and again promised him his protection.

Instructors in the spiritual life observe, with good reason, that the true followers of Christian poverty are more really the masters of the riches of the world than they who possess them; for the rich, being violently attached to their riches, are more the slaves of wealth than its masters. It is for this cause that the royal prophet calls rich men, *men of riches;* as if he would say, their riches do not belong to them, but they to their riches, since their riches command and domineer over them. They continually take pains to increase their riches; and the more they have, the more uneasy they become in their cares to retain them, and the greater slaves they are: "*their wealth,*" says Solomon, "*even robs them of their sleep.*" (a) On the contrary, religious have everything they want, without the trouble of knowing whether it be dear or cheap, or whether the year be scarce or plentiful.

One of the greatest treasures which our blessed Saviour left to His disciples, was that of His holy peace—that peace which the world, with all its possessions, cannot give—that peace which the

(a) Eccles. v. 11.

world, with all its privations, cannot take away —the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding. And who better enjoys this holy peace than the truly poor—the poor in spirit? Certainly, the more we separate ourselves from earthly things, the more we tear from our hearts all attachment to sensible objects, the more shall we be enabled to raise ourselves up to Almighty God, and to unite ourselves to the source of all good. Behold the humble St. Francis of Assisi, the model of holy poverty, clad in the poorest habit, with a rope as a girdle, and scarcely a roof under which to repose his weary limbs. Compare him with the renowned Solomon, seated on his regal throne, possessing countless riches, revered and admired by all, and having at his command every pleasure of earth. Which of these was the happiest, which enjoyed the truest peace, the most solid joy? St. Francis could not rest at night in his poor cell! but why? was it because troubled with anxious thoughts, with useless repinings over his afflictions? Oh, no! his holy soul was so inundated with torrents of sweet delight, his heart was so filled with overflowing streams of divine love, that for this, and this alone, he could not contain himself; yes, and for hours and hours he would continue to exclaim, in transports of joy, "My God and my all, my God and my all." He felt, that in possessing his God, he enjoyed every good: thus was his soul filled with an uninterrupted peace. But if we look at Solomon, in the midst of all his abundance, we see him a prey to the greatest misery, weary even of life; we hear him declare, that in all his possessions and pleasures, he found nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit.

Such, then, being the effect of true religious poverty upon the soul, it is no wonder that the saints bore to it so much affection. It is related of St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, that when she heard poor persons begging, it seemed as if she felt a holy envy towards them. She herself desired to go begging, and was wont to say: "Oh! if I had ever been permitted to ask alms, I should have gloried in it; and when in rainy weather I returned home tired and comfortless, how great would have been my delight! I am not worthy of this." She would never wear any but old and worn-out clothes, and the meaner they were, the better she liked them; so that when the superior wished to provide some fresh garment for her, she was obliged to let another sister wear it first.

We read also of the venerable Joseph Anchieta, that after the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, he placed his greatest delight in being poor. So long as he was a private religious he had neither coffer, desk, or box of any kind, not even a pen to write with. He very willingly parted with his writings to whoever wanted them; and such of them as he deemed to be of more importance he surrendered to his superior. Objects of devotion, such as rosaries, pictures, and so forth, when offered to him by others, he would decline, after expressing much gratitude, and extolling the kind feeling that prompted the gift; never would he accept or keep by him anything of the sort, fearing, as he said, that the heart might insensibly become attached to it.

St. Arsenius was also a great lover of holy poverty. The other solitaries said of him, that as no one was more richly clad than Arsenius

whilst he lived at court, so none of the inhabitants of the desert wore a more mean or poor habit than he, after retiring from the world. His poverty was so great, that having occasion for a little money to procure some necessaries in sickness, he was obliged to receive it in alms, upon which he cried out: "I give Thee thanks, O my God, that Thou hast made me worthy to be thus compelled to ask an alms in Thy name."

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"Blessed is he that thinketh upon the needy and the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the evil day." (a)—*Holy David.*

"Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail they may receive you into everlasting dwellings." (b)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

One night, whilst St. Joseph Calassanctius was engaged in profound contemplation, God favoured him with a vision, in which three young damsels of superhuman beauty appeared before him: the foremost of them, weeping and lamenting, said that she was driven out and abandoned by everybody: Joseph compassionated her, declared himself ready to assist her, and said he would never forsake her; it then seemed to him that he arose, stretched forth his arms towards her, and raised her from the ground. At this moment he returned to his natural consciousness. The

(a) Psal. xl. 2. (b) Luke xvi. 9.

following day, on which the stigmata of St. Francis were commemorated, he spent a long time in prayer in the church, at an hour when the principal concourse had dispersed; whilst he was thus engaged, he observed a young female moving about in the church; in every respect, in appearance, dress, and lamentation, similar to the one he had seen the night before in his vision. Astonished at the sight, he asked her who she was: "I am Poverty," said she, "and am driven away by everybody." Joseph instantly took his cloak off his own shoulders, and offered it to her, that she might cover herself with it; but whilst he was in the act of doing so, the maiden disappeared. On resuming his prayer, a celestial light gave him to understand, that the three virgins who had visited him the preceding night, were Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, whereupon all his fears and anxiety vanished.

Another day, whilst he was at prayer in the church, the seraphical patriarch appeared to him, accompanied by three beautiful young damsels splendidly attired; at this sight, Joseph was filled with reverential fear, but St. Francis encouraged him, saying, "These are Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, and I am come to espouse them to thee." He then drew three magnificent rings from his bosom, and commanded him to espouse them. Joseph promptly obeyed, and no sooner were these mysterious espousals accomplished, than he was rapt in a long and profound ecstasy, on recovering from which, he found his heart overflowing with celestial delight, and returned grateful thanks to the Almighty, and to St. Francis.

On another day, Poverty again appeared to him

in her usual form, as a beautiful and strikingly-modest virgin; she implored his aid, and then vanished. He then began to consider whether in his schools any description of poor youths were excluded. He recollected there were no Jews amongst his scholars, whereupon he sought them out, and invited them to share the benefits of education, saying, we are the children of one and the same heavenly Father, and He makes no distinction between Jew and Greek.

Once the princess of Piedmont gave to St. Francis of Sales a diamond of great value, with the express intention, that he should keep it for himself. "This is yours," said she, "on condition that you keep it for my sake." "I promise you this," said the holy prelate, "except the poor should stand in need of relief." "In that event," replied the princess, who was a person of great virtue, "be satisfied to pawn the diamond, and I will take care to redeem it." "I should be afraid," replied Francis, "that such an event would happen too often, and I should abuse your kindness." After some time, the holy prelate had occasion to visit the princess, and as she did not see the diamond which she had given him, she inquired what was become of it. "Madam," said Francis with a smile, "I cannot be accountable for myself; I am very ill-qualified to keep any precious article."

This saint was very particular to recommend to others, what he practised himself; and used to say, that wealthy people may practise poverty in the midst of their riches, by relieving the poor. "Frequently deprive yourself," says he, in the Introduction to a Devout Life, "of some portion of what you possess in favour of the poor; for, in

proportion as you give away what you have to others, you impoverish yourself; and the more you give, the poorer you become. It is true that God will reward you, not only in the next life, but also in this; for nothing so surely brings prosperity as alms-deeds; yet so long as God does not thus reward you, you are the poorer for what you have given, and have the merit of poverty. O holy and rich is that poverty which is produced by giving alms! Love the poor and poverty, for thus you will become truly poor, since, as the Scripture says, we become like the things which we love. Love assimilates us to the beloved. '*Who is weak*, says St. Paul, *and I am not weak?*' He might have said, who is poor, and I am not poor? Because love assimilated him to those whom he loved. If then you love the poor, you will really participate in their poverty, and be poor like them. Now, if you desire the blessing of the poor, be often amongst them; be pleased to see them in your house, and to visit them in theirs; converse familiarly with them; be glad to have them near you in the church, in the streets, and wherever you meet with them. Be poor in tongue with them, speaking to them in their own language; but rich in hand, imparting to them a share of the abundance which God has intrusted to you."

"Would you do still more? Be not satisfied with being poor with the poor, but be still poorer than the poor themselves. But how shall this be? The servant is inferior to his master; become then the servant of the poor, go and serve them on their beds of sickness with your own hands: feed them with your own hands; minister to them in the most lowly offices. Oh, thus to

serve the poor, is to reign more gloriously than kings. In this respect, I cannot sufficiently admire the fervour of St. Louis, one of the greatest kings, for he was great in every sense of the word. He frequently served at the table of the poor whom he maintained, and always had three of them to dine with him at his own; not unfrequently he ate the remains of their pottage, with an incredible affection for them and their state. He frequently visited the hospitals, and generally served those poor patients who were afflicted with the most loathsome diseases, such as lepers, and those eaten away with ulcers and cancers; this he did bare-headed and kneeling on the ground, regarding them as the representatives of the Saviour of the world, and cherishing them with the tender affection of a mother towards her infant. St. Elizabeth, daughter of the king of Hungary, was frequently amongst the poor; and for recreation, would sometimes dress like a poor person among her attendants, saying to them, "If I were poor, I would dress in this manner." O, my God, how poor was this princess in the midst of her riches, and how rich in the midst of her poverty!

Blessed are they who are poor in like manner, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. To such, at the last day, the King of the poor and the King of kings will say, "*I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: naked, and you covered me. Come possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (a)

Once, Jesus Christ appearing to St. Francis of

(a) St. Matt. xxv. 35.

Assisium, whilst he was still living in his father's house, addressed to him those words of the Gospel. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." At these words, the saint became greatly enamoured with poverty and humility, and resolved to devote himself to the service of lepers, of whom, before this, he had so much horror, that far from allowing them to be in his presence, as soon as he saw them, at whatever distance, he turned away from them. But now for the love of Jesus crucified, who is represented by the prophet Isaias under the despised figure of a leper, he attended upon them in their hospitals, where, having abundantly supplied them with alms, he made their beds, dressed their sores, and performed for them the most abject services; he often even kissed their hands and their faces with great feelings of commiseration. One day, whilst he was at prayer, our blessed Lord stimulated him to continue this charitable exercise, with the following words:— "Francis, if thou desirest to know My will, thou must despise and hate all that thou hast loved and wished for till now. Let not this new path alarm thee, for if the things which now please thee must become bitter and distasteful, those which now displease thee will become sweet and agreeable." Shortly before his death, he declared that what had seemed to him most bitter in serving the lepers, had been changed into what was most pleasing to him.

The sight of Jesus Christ fastened to the cross, made him feel the misery of the poor so intensely, that he would have wished to employ all he had, and his own person, in their relief. Sometimes

he did strip himself to clothe them. In the absence of his father, he caused much more bread to be brought to table at meals than was necessary, and when his mother asked the reason, he said, "that it was, in order to give more quickly to those who came to ask, for I cannot bear their complaints; they pierce my heart with grief."

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory, for the memory thereof is immortal, because it is known both with God and with men." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Chastity is the lily of virtues, and makes men almost equal to angels. Everything is beautiful in proportion to its purity. Now the purity of man is chastity, which is called honesty; and the observance of it honour, and also integrity; and its contrary is called corruption; in short, it has this peculiar excellence above the other virtues, that it preserves both soul and body fair and unspotted."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The virtue of chastity is the brightest ornament which a man can possess; it makes him, all foul, unclean, and carnal, as he naturally is, pure, clean, and heavenly. Chastity imparts to the soul a celestial beauty, infuses into it a divine fragrance, and almost restores it to its original justice. From the sin of Adam we derive so corrupt a nature, that we feel strongly inclined to debase ourselves to the level of brutes, by indulging our sensual appetites; but the holy, the

(a) Wis. iv. 1.

lovely, the beautiful, and admirable virtue of purity cures our natural corruption, and enables us to lead a holy life, free from all sensual defilements.

The saints of God, enlightened from above, have ever seen in holy chastity a treasure of infinite value, and loved it accordingly with all the affection of their heart. Thus, in the Old Testament, we find the holy patriarch Joseph willing to expose himself to the hatred of his powerful master's wife, and cheerfully to endure all the pains and privations of a long imprisonment, rather than sully his virginal purity. So also the chaste Susanna, seeing herself obliged to choose between a violent and disgraceful death, or the loss of her innocence, cheerfully exposed herself to all the hatred and revenge of her wicked lovers, rather than part with the precious lily of purity; and unhesitatingly preferred to lose her character and her reputation before men, and to suffer all the pains of an ignominious death, rather than forfeit her spotless innocence. Coming to the new law, we find many saints joyfully submitting to every species of suffering and privation, in order to preserve their virginal purity. St. Jerome relates the history of a young man, who being strictly bound hand and foot, and having no other means left to him to resist the attempts that were made against his purity, went so far as to bite off his tongue, and spit it in the face of his temptress. St. Benedict, to preserve the treasure of his chastity, rolled himself among thorns, which he empurpled with his blood. The celebrated Martinianus trod on burning coals, to extinguish the ardour of evil passions. St. Hilarion and St. Jerome were accustomed to

strike their breasts with hard stones, in order to tame the violent rebellions of their flesh. St. Macarius of Alexandria, in order to extinguish a temptation of the flesh, condemned himself to pass six whole months in the marshes of Scete, which were much infested by large gnats, with stings like wasps: during his course of penance, he was so roughly treated, and stung in so terrible a manner by these insects, that at his return home, his whole body appeared like that of a leper, and he could only be known by his voice. On another occasion, he walked barefooted over bushes of thorns, that by thus inflicting wounds on his feet, he might destroy the heat of concupiscence. And what shall we say of those Christian heroines, who loved so much their virginal purity, that, rather than lose it, they refused marriage with the highest princes and nobles of the earth, and willingly endured every torment, and even death itself, in consequence of their refusal? The glorious virgin St. Agnes bore such a deep affection to holy purity, that from her tenderest youth, she consecrated it to God by vow. From her history, we find, that being distinguished for her extreme beauty, she was eagerly sought in marriage by many before she had reached twelve years of age; and especially by the son of the prefect of Rome, who was most anxious to be united to her immediately; but she, with a noble contempt, refused this and all other similar proposals. Repulse, however, instead of cooling the ardour of the young man, only increased his desire to own her as his wife; and going to Agnes, with a gentle voice, he made her the offer of his hand, endeavouring to point out to her the advantages she would find in responding to

his love. But she was not to be won by his flatteries, and replied plainly to him in these extraordinary words:—"Leave me, thou instrument of Satan, thou child of death, for I am contracted to a much better lover;" and then to destroy any hope which he might entertain of bending her to his wishes, she proceeded to describe the qualities of the lover she had chosen. "He is noble," said the holy girl; "He is beautiful, wise, rich, and powerful: as to His nobility, He has God for His Father, and with Him He has dwelt from all eternity; His mother is a virgin, who surpasses in excellence all creatures. Such is His beauty, that it exceeds in splendour the light of the sun and of the moon; and His wisdom has so captivated my heart, that I can think only of Him. His riches are so great, that He never leaves any of those who serve him in poverty, but fills them with His treasures; and to me, He has given what outweighs the value of the whole empire of Rome. He has taken me for his spouse, and in proof of His love, has bestowed on me vestments and jewels of inestimable value. Added to this, He is so powerful, that none can resist His will either in heaven or on earth, and by His presence alone He heals the sick and raises the dead; I love Him more than my life, which I should rejoice to lay down for Him. The affection between us has nothing carnal in it, but it is of a nature wholly heavenly and spiritual; so that by loving Him I become more pure, in approaching Him I become more innocent, and by embracing Him I become more chaste. How, then, can I, through the hope of any benefit, or through the fear of any evil, desert such a Spouse?" "O glorious virgin," exclaims St. Maximus, "what

a pattern thou gavest to virgins, of the way they should love Jesus Christ! Oh, how well didst thou teach them to prize above all things the beauty of their heavenly Spouse, by despising, for His sake, the riches of the world and all sensual joys!" The young man, indignant at the firmness of Agnes, accused her as a Christian, and obtained of the heathen judge, that she should be put in chains, and threatened at the same time with death by the most cruel tortures, unless she changed her resolution.

"It is usual," observes St. Ambrose, "for girls of this tender age to be subject to fear; sometimes they can hardly bear a harsh look from their parents, and complain of the prick of a needle as if they had received a severe wound." But Agnes was intrepid under the bloody hands of the butchers, and instead of trembling at the sound of chains, she offered her neck, her hands, and her whole body to martyrdom. The tyrant could not succeed, notwithstanding his power, in obtaining his will, and mad with rage, he condemned her to death. But what then? "Never spouse," says St. Ambrose, "went with more joy and rapture to her nuptials, than the holy virgin trod the way to execution, amidst the wonder and admiration of all." The executioners employed all their efforts to induce her to change her resolution; but, with an invincible constancy, she replied to them: "Do not expect me to break my faith to my Spouse; your hopes are an insult to Him, to Whom my whole heart belongs. I have no other desire but that of quickly joining Him, Whose I already am. Come, come quickly to meet me, my heavenly Spouse, and receive me into Thy arms. O, ye executioners, why do you

delay to execute my sentence? Perish this body, which has been looked upon with love, by any eyes but Thine." Then, placing herself calmly in prayer, and bowing her head, she expired, and her soul entered into the joy of her Lord.

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"Be clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil." [a]—*The Prophet Isaias.*

"This is the will of God, your sanctification. . . . . That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles that know not God. . . . . For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto sanctification." [b]—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

THE various crimes committed by men, and which, like a furious torrent, rush in upon and deluge this wretched world, arise from three sources, "the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." These are the fearful arms which the devil makes use of to entice men to follow his standard, and to ruin themselves. With these he descends to battle against the saints of God. Our Saviour, who became man in order to rescue us from the powers of darkness, and to cleanse to Himself an acceptable people, pursuer of good works, declared open war against these fatal sources of man's perdition, and provided His disciples with

[a] Isaias i. 16. [b] 1 Thes. iv. 3—5, 7.

suitable arms to fight against them. He proposes to them holy humility to subdue the spirit of pride, poverty to overcome the spirit of covetousness, and purity against the concupiscence of the flesh.

Whoever, therefore, wishes to belong to Christ, and to be His disciple, must take care to preserve himself clean from all sensual defilement, and, as the apostle says, must crucify his flesh with its concupiscences. This is an obligation which extends to all Christians, whatever may be their rank and condition of life. St. John, in the Apocalypse, says, that the unchaste will have no part in the glorious kingdom of Christ, and will never enter into the heavenly Jerusalem. "Do not err," says the Apostle St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians; "neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate . . . . . shall possess the kingdom of God. (a) You are the temple of the living God; as God saith, "I will dwell in them and walk amongst them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; wherefore go out from among them and be you separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God." (b) "Follow peace," says the same apostle, writing to the Hebrews, "with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see God." (c) By *holiness*, as St. Jerome and

(a) 1 Cor. vi. 9—10. (b) 2 Cor. vi. 16—18: vii. 1.
(c) Hebrews xii. 14.

St. Chrysostom teach, is here to be understood chastity. No one without chastity shall see God; no one that is defiled or that worketh abomination shall ever enter into the tabernacles of the Lord.

Deeply impressed with this truth, the saints looked with the greatest horror on the very shadow of impurity. St. Stanislaus Kotska, it is said, fainted away when he happened to hear an unchaste word. It is related of St. Liguori, that at the age of twelve years, having joined some of his companions, who were amusing themselves at an indifferent game, heard one of them uttering a very indecent expression. Alphonso reddened when he heard it, and with an air of severity turned towards his companions and said, "How is this, shall God be offended for the sake of a few miserable pence? Take back your money;" and throwing on the ground what he had won, he turned his back upon them with a holy indignation, and secreted himself in another part of the garden. But this was not all: when evening came he was nowhere to be found. They called him, but they called in vain; and, as night was approaching, every one went to seek him. What was their surprise when they discovered him on his knees before a picture of the blessed Virgin, quite absorbed and ravished in God, so that it was some time before he came to himself, notwithstanding the noise his companions made.

From this time he began to have a most especial love for the holy virtue of purity, regarding it as the most precious ornament of the soul; and during the whole period of his youth, no one ever remarked, in his conversations with young companions, a sign or a word that could indicate a shadow of impropriety.

Of St. Joseph Calassanctius it is recorded that a young lady, connected to him by family, once dared to renew against him the shameful attack recorded in Holy Writ, as made against another Joseph, in the court of Pharoah. To young Calassanctius this was like a thunderbolt, which overwhelmed him with confusion, fear, and horror; still he retained his presence of mind, and promptly turning to God in his heart, whom he invoked aloud, he instantly fled, and repaired immediately to a neighbouring church, where, prostrate before our Lord, he thanked Him with tears of humility and gratitude, for having sustained him with His Almighty hand whilst on the edge of so dangerous a precipice; then, with lively tenderness, he renewed his vow of chastity; and, lastly, devised means to withdraw himself for the future from a similar danger, without in any manner compromising the honour of his relative. With the approbation of his confessor, he decided on his immediate departure from Valencia: he pleaded the emergency of the case as excuse for not paying farewell visits to any of his acquaintance, and repaired at once to Alcala, in Castille, there to complete his course of theology.

Still more wonderful is what we read of the angelic doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas. His carnal friends, being grievously offended at the resolution which he had taken of entering religion, introduced an infamous woman into the prison of the castle where he was confined, that she might seduce him, and withdraw him from his holy purpose. But no sooner did the holy youth see the seducer entering the prison, than, burning with a holy zeal, he rose, and taking a firebrand in his hand, rushed forward and put her to flight.

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"He that loveth cleanness of heart, for the grace of his lips shall have the king for his friend." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"The Lord will reward me according to my justice, and according to the cleanness of my hands will he render to me." (b)—*Holy David.*

Nothing is more striking in Holy Scripture, as well as in the lives of the saints, than the particular love which God has always showed to the followers of chastity. Thus, in becoming man, the Eternal Son chose for His own mother the purest of virgins, a virgin so chaste that when the angel appeared to her to tell her that she was to be the mother of the world's Redeemer, she trembled with anxiety, not knowing how she could be the mother of the Messiah without losing her beloved treasure of purity, and ready, as the saints declare, to forego that high dignity rather than part with her virginity; and as Jesus was pleased to be born of a pure and spotless virgin, so He fore-ordained and chose the pure and chaste St. Joseph for His guardian. During His life, again, though He permitted His enemies to load Him with calumnies, to call Him by many abusive titles—an impostor, a wine-bibber, a seducer of the people, one possessed with devils, and so forth—He never suffered them to cast the smallest imputation against His purity. To His disciples, He said, "Suffer little children

(a) Prov. xxii. 11. (b) 2 Kings xxii. 21.

to come to Me;" and taking them in His arms He blessed them, because they possessed the purity of angels.

The especial love which our Lord bore to St. John the Evangelist is another very strong proof of His affection for chastity, for it was founded upon his possessing that gift above all the other disciples. *Præ cæteris discipulis diligebat Jesus Joannem*, says the Church, *quia prærogativa castitatis specialiter præditus erat.* St. John was a virgin, who had never stained his purity or sullied his innocence, and, therefore, was he called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Full well did our Lord evince His special love for him, as we learn from Holy Scripture. He was amongst the three first called to be companions of Jesus, and elevated to the sublime ministry of the Apostolate, and he never quitted his Master; he witnessed His most remarkable miracles, and, above all, was present at His transfiguration. At the Last Supper, during which the most holy Sacrament was instituted, it was his blessed lot to be seated at the right of his Lord, and, by an unexampled privilege, to rest his head on his Master's breast and repose on His bosom. There it was that he drank deeply in the knowledge of divine things, so that to him, above all the Evangelists, it was given to manifest the mighty mystery of Christ's divinity. Thence was his mind illuminated to discover and express the most obscure and hidden treasures of divine wisdom; thence did he acquire his burning and ardent love of his adorable Master. It was through the superiority which purity gives to her children that he continued stedfastly with Christ during the whole season of His passion, and at the hour of his death received from Him the

honourable charge of guardian to the Divine Mother, in the words, " Behold thy Mother."

But Purity has not merited for St. John alone to be treated by Christ with such distinguished affection; those in succeeding times who have imitated his purity have also shared with him the most convincing proofs of the love of Jesus. Who does not remember, with a holy joy, the miraculous appearances of the Infant Jesus to St. Stanislaus, to St. Anthony of Padua, to St. Cajetan of Thienna, to St. Felix Capucin, to St. Philip Neri, and to St. Teresa? He descended into their arms: He permitted them to caress and fondle Him, smiling at them with the sweetest kindness, and taking pleasure in conversing with them!

And how shall we recount the wonderful protection which God has displayed in behalf of chaste souls, in their various trials? We read that the chaste Joseph, having informed his father Jacob of some fault of his brothers against the virtue of purity, had to endure great persecution from them; they sold him into Egypt, and there, rather than forfeit his virginity, he had to allow himself to be cast into prison. But God could not forget His faithful servant; He raised him from his chains to the highest dignities of the kingdom, making him next unto Pharoah the king. Again, we see the chaste Susanna persecuted for her love of holy purity, and even by her base calumniators condemned to a cruel and ignominious death, but behold God raises up the holy prophet Daniel, who stops the multitude on the way to her execution, discovers the calumny of the old men her accusers, rescues her from death, and restores and magnifies her honour before all people.

Coming to the new law, we have innumerable instances of the especial protection God has vouchsafed to such as guarded their purity for love of Him. Thus St. Agnes, being condemned to be conducted to a place where she might lose this precious treasure, was delivered from the danger by an angel of God. St. Lucy, when the guards attempted to put a similar sentence into execution, could not be moved from the spot, where she stood firm as a rock. Again, we read of St. Theophila that the first who attempted to violate her purity, when she was led to one of those abodes of vice, for the same purpose, was instantly struck dead by an angel, and another was struck with blindness, so that she escaped unharmed. In his letter to Pope Innocent, St. Jerome says that a lady was falsely accused of having lost her virtue, and condemned to the punishment of death, but that the executioner in vain attempted to effect the sentence, for, though he directed seven blows at her, he produced no more effect by his steel than if she had been a statue. We also read, that when the Empress Cunegunda, the wife of the Emperor Henry, was calumniously accused, and condemned to expiate her supposed crime by walking over red-hot iron, she trod upon it without receiving the slightest injury. Thus chastity is not only amiable in the sight of God, but procures also His special protection and favour.

NINETEENTH DAY.

"He that is unmarried is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please God; but he that is with a wife is anxious about the things of the world, how to please his wife; and he is divided. And the unmarried woman and virgin thinketh what is of the Lord, to be holy, both in body and spirit; but she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how to please her husband." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"If any one shall say, that it is not a better thing, and more blessed, to remain in virginity or celibacy than to marry, let him be excommunicated."—*The Holy Council of Trent.*

THE truth of the transcendant beauty and excellency of virginity, has been deeply felt by many holy virgins, who have willingly endured the severest persecutions and the hardest sufferings, rather than lose this estimable treasure. We read of St. Rose of Lima, that first fruit of saints in the new world, that, moved by the spirit of God, she, at the age of five years, consecrated to Him by vow, her virginal purity, promising that she would never have any other Spouse, but Him alone. And as soon as she had made this vow, unknown to her mother she cut off her hair, in order to manifest to the Spouse she had chosen, that by disfiguring herself, she intended rather to disgust than to please men; and that she absolutely renounced the world, with which she never wished to have any intercourse. The stratagem which she practised, in order to avoid appearing at assemblies, or accompanying her mother in visits to friends and relations, was not less surprising; she rubbed her eyelids with pimento, which

(a) 1 Cor. vii. 32—34.

is a very sharp burning sort of Indian pepper: and as this made her eyes red as fire, and so painful, that she could not bear the light, she hereby escaped going into company. Her mother having found out this artifice, reprimanded her for it, and told her of a person who had lost his sight by a similar act of indiscretion. Rose answered modestly, "It would be much better for me, my dear mother, to be blind all the days of my life, than to be obliged to see the vanities and follies of the world."

By having thus disfigured herself, and by the vow of virginity, the saint thought to have removed from herself all danger of being sought in marriage by any one. But the advantages she had received from nature offered an innocent opposition to the resolution she had made; for her extreme beauty, her refined mind, her delightful conversation, and her virtue itself, captivated many hearts, and drew towards her admirers from all sides. In order to extinguish these rising flames in the hearts of others, she used many mortifications; she attenuated her face with fasting, sought to destroy her delicate white complexion, washed her hands in hot lime, to take off the skin; and further, that she might not be the cause of sensual pleasure to any, shut herself up closely in the house, only going out when it was quite necessary, which was very seldom. But, notwithstanding all these precautions, she was unable to prevent several persons from seeking her in marriage. Amongst others, one of the most distinguished ladies of the city, as much delighted with her virtue as with her beauty, wished her only son to marry her; and openly made the request to St. Rose's parents. They

having eleven children to provide for, received the proposal most favourably, thinking the alliance would be very advantageous to their family. Rose was the only person to whom it was disagreeable; she blamed herself for the proposal, and lamented that frail beauty which brought upon her this great misfortune; seeing that there was no means of escaping, but by openly declaring that she would never consent to marry, and that she had a horror of the very thought of it; she made known her resolution with a firmness which surprised her parents, though it did not make them give up the hope of inducing her to comply with their wishes. They employed both threats and caresses; and finding her inflexible in her resolution, went so far as to give her blows, and load her with injuries: in a word, St. Rose had the same sufferings to endure, as St. Catharine of Sienna suffered from her mother for a similar cause.

But all was in vain: Rose, immoveable as a rock, feared neither threats, persecutions, nor blows, but remained constant in her resolution, until at last she overcame all opposition, and was allowed to enjoy the inestimable blessing of her virginal purity.

We read a similar fact in the life in the blessed Colomba of Rieti. It is related that her modest and chaste beauty, joined to her purity, which was known to the whole city, drew the eyes of many towards her to seek her in marriage. In the mean time, her parents arranged a match for her, without her consent, and began to procure for her rich and becoming dresses; but observing that this, instead of being agreeable to Colomba, only gave her trouble and annoyance, they made

known the contract which they had already agreed to for her future nuptuals. The young virgin turned pale, and using the most efficacious arguments which her mind and heart suggested to her, represented her repugnances: though she concealed at first the spiritual espousals, in which she was already engaged to Christ, to whom she had consecrated her purity. Her parents, who had gone too far to yield at once to the respectful entreaties of their child, and hoping to vanquish her with caresses and diversions, tried every means of this sort, that lay in their power. In prosecution of this object, several of her relations being one day assembled, together with her parents, all with one accord began to endeavour to extort her consent, some with entreaties, others with commands. Colomba defended herself respectfully for some time, but finding the assault grow stronger, and seeing herself attacked on every side, filled with holy fervour and courage, she said, "Be assured, my dear parents and relations, that you can never prevail, for my refusal is not an empty ceremony, but an eternal truth. I am no longer able to agree to your wishes, nor to consent to have any earthly spouse, for I am already espoused to the Monarch of heaven, and to Him, I have concentrated my virginity by vow: I will belong to Him alone, and to no other, and no vain honour, no grandeur, no fear, no torment will be able to make me change my resolution. Do not, my dear friends, dispute with me those honours and favours which God has given me, nor oppose yourselves to what He works in me. Reflect, my dear parents, that the Spouse whom I have chosen is more noble, richer, and more beautiful, than any who

are of this world." This holy appeal was not completed, when her indiscreet assailants, instead of yielding, were inflamed with anger, and began to ill-treat the servant of Christ, some with abuse, others with threats and blows. The brave young girl did not lose courage in the least, but when she found herself alone, for at last they left her, she fell on her knees before an image of Jesus crucified, and repeatedly thanked Him for having made her worthy to begin to suffer something for His love.

But the battle against the holy young virgin was not yet terminated; a stronger attack was preparing: her relatives without regard to justice or reason, when a little time had elapsed, prepared to carry this fortress by treachery and violence. They fixed the day for her marriage, without her knowledge, resolving to extort her consent in the midst of the banquet. When Colomba was informed of this, she threw herself before the crucifix, and bursting into a flood of tears, thus addressed our Lord: "Judge my cause, O my Divine Lover, for it is Thy cause: in Thy mercy come to defend me against the insults which are preparing for me. If Thou dost not assist me, what will become of me? In Thee alone, O my Jesus, I confide, and Thine alone be all the care of preserving for me that which is Thine. Grant that I may suffer any torment, and a thousand cruel deaths, rather than give myself to another."

When the hour destined for the conflict had arrived, and her relatives were come to the house, the afflicted Colomba was called, and told with resolute words, that she must give her consent to the husband they had chosen; the prudent child

submissively asked for a little time to retire to her room, from which she would quickly return to them, with her answer. Her relatives flattered themselves that they had already vanquished her firmness, and expected to receive her consent on her return; when suddenly she presented herself before them, holding in her hand her hair, which she had cut off; and throwing it contemptuously on the ground, she said to them, "This is the gift which I make to you, and for which my Spouse cares not at all; do now with me what you please, for I fear nothing, having Jesus for my defence: take care, however, unfortunate people, not to incur His indignation. I am sorry that the ill-advised young man will have to pay dearly for his error, and to do penance for it." The bystanders, astonished and stunned at her unexpected courage, and confused and awed by a supernatural and divine majesty, which beamed from her countenance, did not know what to say, for no strength can resist the Holy Ghost; and they all departed in confusion and shame.

TWENTIETH DAY.

"In the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married, but shall be as the angels of God in heaven." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"What is more comely than chastity, which makes one generated of impure seed pure, an enemy a domestic, and a man an angel? There is a difference, indeed, between a chaste man and an angel, but in happiness, not in virtue: the angel's chastity is more happy, yet man's is more proved."—*St. Bernard.*

The prophet David, wishing to exalt the dignity of man, says, with feelings of high admiration, that God has raised him to a state little lower than the angels. "*Minuisti eum paulo minus ab Angelis;*" but chastity raises him a step higher, and renders him equal to them. "The life of virgins," says St. Ambrose, "is like that of the angels." "Virginity," says St. Augustine, "is a portion of the angelic integrity." "By preserving chastity," says St. Cyprian, "you become like the angels of God." For in what does the beauty and excellence of the angelic nature chiefly consist? It is in this; the angels, as we know, are pure spirits, they have no sensual feelings or appetites to draw them away from the love of God, they are wholly inflamed with the love of God and of heavenly things: and in like manner, they who preserve holy purity free from every stain, are elevated as it were above sensible objects, and become wholly wrapt in spiritual things, so as to resemble angels.

St. John Chrysostom, speaking of holy purity,

(a) Matt. xxii. 30.

says, that chaste souls in a certain manner surpass the very angels of heaven; because they acquire by great labour and fighting, what the angels possess by nature without the least struggle. The angels, as we know, have no corruptible body to subdue, they have no rebellions of the flesh to struggle against, no allurements of the senses to overcome; and hence it is no wonder that they are all pure and holy. But man, in this corruptible body, drawn by such frequent and violent rebellions of his unruly flesh, influenced through his senses by sensual objects, yet triumphing over the weakness of his nature, preserving himself pure from all the defilements of sin, and living like an angel on earth, is indeed a wondrous miracle of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and displays a sublimity of virtue most glorious in the sight of God.

St. Cyprian speaks thus to virgins: "You already enjoy part of the blessing which one day you will fully possess in glory; for you are not inferior to angels, as long as you remain chaste." In like manner Cassian assures us, that no virtue renders us so like to angels, as chastity, by the help of which, we so live in bodies, as if we carried no flesh about us, and were transformed by it into pure spirits, according to those words of St. Paul, "*you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you.*" (a)

Baronius relates, that when a certain virgin, called Georgia, was on the point of death, a great multitude of doves were seen hovering about her; and when her body was brought to the church, they flew to that part of the roof which was

(a) Rom. viii. 9.

immediately above the corpse, and remained there till after the interment. These doves were regarded, he says, by all who saw them, as angels paying respect and homage to the body of the virgin.

Of the venerable father Pinamonti, it is said that he was endowed with such an immaculate purity of body and soul, that he was esteemed as an angel on earth by all who knew him: his companions on the missions protested, that it gave them a singular delight to see a man who by nature possessed very warm and affectionate feelings, familiarly treating for so many years with all classes of men and women, both in cities and country places, and yet remaining so pure and unstained, that there did not seem to be in him the least imperfection in matter of purity, nor did he even appear capable of certain attachments, which easily grow upon persons, even of eminent virtue.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"Chastity, or cleanness of heart, holds a glorious and distinguished place amongst the virtues, because she alone enables men to see God; hence, Truth itself said, 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,' as if He would say, those are wretched whose hearts are polluted by carnal lust, for they shall be plunged into eternal flames."—*St. Austin.*

It is generally remarked by the saints, that the vice contrary to purity is one of the most awful signs of condemnation. St. Egidius says: "If we except children, the greater part of those who are damned owe their ruin to this detestable vice." The venerable Father Segneri says, that as pride caused the general ruin of the angels, and cast down one-third of the angelic host from their thrones of glory into the lowest depths of hell, so the vice of the flesh is the general cause of the ruin of men, and peoples hell with innumerable souls. The same remark is made by St. Liguori; in his introduction to the treatise on this sin, he says, that all the reprobates in hell have been lost, either particularly on account of this vice, or that, if condemned for other sins, they were also defiled with this.

As the vice of impurity is a sign of condemnation, so the virtue of holy purity is a most striking sign of predestination. The Holy Ghost says, that "*he who loves purity of heart shall be in*

(a) Matt. v. 8.

honour with the king;" that is, he shall be loved by Almighty God, shall be an object of the peculiar affection of the great King of heaven, and shall be protected by Him. Our blessed Redeemer, in the New Testament, shows still more clearly the truth of this, when He says, "*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*" He could not have used stronger language than this, to show that chaste souls are predestined to enjoy eternal life, and that the beatific vision is especially theirs.

Chastity, says St. Bernardine of Sienna, prepares the soul to see her Divine Spouse, by faith in this life, and by glory in the next. It prepares her to see God in this life, because purity bestows upon man the sublime gift of penetrating deeply into the mysteries of God, and of understanding easily and clearly divine and heavenly things. It is the property of holy purity to sharpen and strengthen, by its light, our understanding in the knowledge of supernatural things, so that the more a person excels in this virtue, the more is he enabled to penetrate into the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Thus we find that St. John, who was particularly distinguished for his virginal purity, surpassed the other apostles in the gift of divine wisdom, so that he began his Gospel with the eternal generation of the word of God, soaring, like the eagle, aloft to the throne of God. St. Thomas of Aquin, being a most pure and chaste soul, was enlightened in a most extraordinary manner in the knowledge of supernatural mysteries, and spoke in the most sublime manner of the highest truths of religion. In like manner, we read that many pure and spotless virgins, as St. Catharine of Sienna, St. Teresa, and

others, have been enabled to speak and write with the greatest wisdom upon the most exalted subjects, though possessed of but little human learning. In fact, if we peruse the lives of the saints, we shall find that those who have been raised to the most sublime state of contemplation, and gifted with the greatest knowledge in heavenly things, were all pure and chaste souls. And this vision of God, which begins here upon earth, is but a slight foretaste of what will be brought to its full perfection and development in the life to come, when the virginal spouses of Jesus Christ shall be ravished with the wondrous vision of the all pure and holy God for all eternity, and shall be occupied day and night in the sweet contemplation of His infinite perfections.

We read that St. Gregory of Nazienzen, from his tenderest years, had been a most jealous lover of chastity. Neither the bad example of his companions, the allurements of the senses, nor the evil occasions of which the world is full, could prevail on him to stain the white robe of his virginal purity: and as he was studying philosophy at Athens, he had one day the following vision. While he was engaged in reading, two beautiful and venerable matrons appeared to him, and stood, one on his right, and the other at his left hand. The spotless youth, surprised at the apparition, asked them who they were, and what they wanted; upon which, they said: "Fear nothing; we are thy faithful friends." "I am Chastity," said one; "I am Wisdom," said the other. "God has sent us to thee, that we may abide with thee always, because thou hast prepared a clean dwelling-place within thy heart." This said, they disappeared, having taught

this great truth—that where chastity is, there is wisdom also.

"As health is requisite for the well-being of the body," says St. Bernard, "so purity is requisite for the well-being of the soul; for with a defiled heart God cannot be seen; yet the human soul is made for this end, that it should see its Creator."

Of this great truth, the sages of antiquity, who were noted for their love of wisdom, had a glimmering light. Hence the Pythagoreans said, that men should aim at purification, which consisted in keeping the mind free, as far as possible, from the lust of the body, and accustoming it to dwell by itself, free from the contagion of the flesh. "The great object of a philosopher," says Plato, "must be the purification of his mind; and this purification can only be effected by separating it, as much as possible, from the body, and delivering it from the chains of the flesh; and this full and perfect deliverance is named death, which should be the object of every real philosopher's desire." Cicero, too, in the first book of the Tusculans, speaks of separating the mind as far as possible from the body, and says, that "while we remain on earth, this separation will be an approach to the celestial life." But all that the ancient sages laid down respecting purity of heart, and the necessity of purging the mind from vicious love of sensible things, in order to attain true wisdom, is not only enforced by the Catholic religion, but extended and practised, in a manner that would have been incredible to them.

To the fathers of the desert the great St. Anthony once delivered the following instruc-

tion: "Oh, my dear children in Jesus Christ, may you comprehend how much my love for you exceeds all earthly affection! It is He who makes me prostrate myself, without ceasing, at the feet of the holy altars, in order to obtain from my God that you may know Him, and that you perceive all the price of the grace which He has given to you, and that you may be aware of your danger, and that you may be able to offer yourselves to God as victims adorned with that purity, without which no one can see God. My dear children, my soul is covered with confusion when I consider that we have the faculty of doing what the saints have done; and that, nevertheless, we do not try to elevate our minds, to seek the glory of heaven, or to imitate the works of the saints, nor to walk in their footsteps, in order to be partakers with them of that eternal inheritance, which is reserved for us by that God who is our common Father, to whom be glory and honour, for ever and ever. Amen."

"Let the heart that desireth to see God, study to be clean," says Richard of St. Victor, "that it may rise to the contemplation of divine things. Oh, what earnestness! Oh, what diligence is necessary in that arduous study, before the mind can perfectly wipe off the ashes of earthly love, and be consumed by the flame of true love; before it can refine the gold of its intelligence to the purity accordant with the dignity of such a work."

"Oh!" says St. Teresa, "what subject for fear is there in life, and what different kinds of ardour meet here! Some flames consume the soul, which reduce it to ashes, and others purify it, and give it power to live and to possess God for eternity.

Oh, my God! grant that I may not depart from this life until I shall have placed all my desire in Thee, until it will be impossible for me to love anything else but only Thee. Grant, Oh my God! that this word, '*love*,' may never pass my lips, excepting when pronounced for Thee, since, Thou alone excepted, everything fails, everything perishes, and all is nothing."

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"I beheld, and lo! a Lamb stood upon Mount Sion, and with Him a hundred forty and four thousand, having His name and the name of His father written on their foreheads. . . . . And they sung, as it were, a new canticle before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the ancients; and no man could say the canticle but those hundred forty-four thousand who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb." (b)—*The Apostle St. John.*

Our Saviour is called in Holy Scripture, the Spotless Lamb and the Beloved, who feeds amongst the lilies; in conformity with this, St. John here sees Him as a Lamb, surrounded by those pure souls, one hundred and forty-four thousand virgins who had the name of God and the Lamb on their foreheads, thereby showing, that they belong to God and to his son Jesus in a par-

(a) 2 Cor. xi. 2. (b) Apoc. xiv. 1, 3, 4.

ticular manner, having a characteristic mark of his chosen servants, as belonging to Jesus. It is said also, that they sing a new canticle, which none other could sing, namely, that they enjoyed a peculiar glory in the kingdom of God. Again, it is said, they were purchased from among men; because, although all men are purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ from the slavery of Satan, yet pure souls are selected from amongst others, as the chosen companions of the Lamb, as His intimate attendants: and finally, they are said to be the first fruits of God and the Lamb; for as the first fruits are looked upon as the best, the richest, and the most valuable, so pure souls form the most chosen part of the elect. This consideration must be a source of great consolation to all pure souls, but especially to religious persons, who renounce, for the love of Jesus, all sensual gratifications, and devote themselves to a life of perfect chastity. St. Liguori remarks, that when our Saviour speaks to Christians in general, He calls Himself, Master, Pastor, or Father; but when he speaks of virgins, He calls Himself their Spouse, because, although all just souls are spouses of Jesus, yet, virgins consecrated to God are His spouses in a more special manner. Sublime indeed, exclaims the same saint, is the dignity of virgins: each of them can glory and say: "I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve." He to whom the celestial spirits ardently desire to minister, is my Spouse; with His own ring He has pledged me, and with a crown has adorned me as His own. My Creator, the Sovereign of the universe, has espoused me, has conferred upon me a crown, has raised me to the dignity of a queen.

St. Jerome exhorts religious to take a holy pride in this exalted dignity of spouses of the Redeemer. "Learn," he says, "O Spouse of God, a holy pride. Know that thou art raised above worldlings, and say: I have found Him whom my soul sought: I will hold Him; and will not let Him go." Seculars glory in their nuptials with men of rank and fortune; but you who are the spouses of the King of heaven can boast of better espousals. Say, then, with pride, and with holy joy; I have found the object of my affections; I will embrace Him with love, and will not permit Him to depart from me.

Happy virgins, says St. Ignatius the martyr,—happy virgins, who are consecrated to Jesus Christ. They may be assured that they have obtained the most beautiful, the most noble, the most opulent, and most amiable Spouse that can be found in heaven or on earth. Hence it was that blessed Clare of Montefalco used to say, her virginity was so dear to her, that, rather than lose it, she would be content to suffer the severest pangs during her whole life. St. Domitillia, the emperor's neice, through a love of virginity, refused the hand of Count Aurelian; and when it was argued that she might lawfully marry him, because, although a Gentile, he would allow her to remain a Christian, she replied: "If to a young woman were offered the choice of a monarch or a peasant, which would she prefer? If I marry Aurelian, I must renounce the nuptials of the King of heaven, and would not that be the extreme of folly? You may, therefore, tell the count that I cannot accede to his proposal." Thus she preserved her virginity, which she had consecrated to Jesus Christ; and, rather than prove unfaithful to her divine Spouse,

she suffered herself to be burned alive by her barbarous lover. The holy virgin St. Susanna made a similar reply to the Emperor Dioclesian, who offered her the title of empress on condition she would marry his son-in-law Maximin, whom he had created Cæsar; and in punishment, for her refusal, she was rewarded with the crown of martyrdom.

Such being the excellence and merit of virginity, no wonder that the saints loved and valued so highly the religious profession, the means of keeping pure and immaculate their virginal robe. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi's greatest delight was to find herself in holy enclosure, sure of never having to return to the world. When considering this benefit, she seemed actually to dissolve in sweetness, and with great affection kissed the walls of the monastery, saying to those who asked her why she did so, "Have I not great reason, my sisters, to do this? These holy walls separate me from the unhappy world, and secure to me the greatest treasure which I possess on earth," by which she meant her virginity. On another occasion she said, "If the men of the world knew the blessed enjoyment of a virgin's life, they would as quickly hasten to enrol themselves in the most austere communities as the thirsty deer panteth after the fountain. The more a vine is hedged in, the safer it is."

She had such an abhorrence of the parlour, to which secular friends were admitted, that when obliged to pass near it she felt pain, and said that spouses of Christ could draw nothing from that place but disgust, disturbance, and temptations; and she usually called it "the place of distractions." Whenever she heard the parlour named

she said, "I call it not the parlour, but the purgatory." She exhorted all the sisters to shun it as much as possible, saying, "Remember, sisters, that you are consecrated to God, and that no sister ever leaves the grates without requiring some time to recover that interior peace which she had before, for the discourses and reasonings of seculars, veil, and often overshadow, the white lily of chastity." If she saw any one going with joy to the parlour, she would say, "Sister, one may clearly see that you are not entirely become one of us, for it is the mark of the nuns of St. Mary of the Angels not to be rejoiced, but saddened, when called to the grates." If, on the contrary, she saw amongst the nuns one who had a great aversion for the parlour, she rejoiced, and regarded this as an especial fruit of the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"You are the salt of the earth. . . . . You are the light of the world." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"In all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distress. . . . . in chastity." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

All Christians are bound to guard with diligence, according to their state, the virtue of chastity; because all Christians, as holy Scripture tells us,

(a) Matt. v. 13, 14. (b) 2 Cor. vi. 4, 6.

are members of the sacred body of Christ, which is holy: all Christians are temples of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in them: all Christians are called to sanctification, and not to uncleanness: all Christians are required to be holy as God is holy.

But if purity be necessary for all Christians, it is much more imperative on priests, on the ministers of the spotless Lamb who feeds among lilies. A priest, by his ordination, is dedicated to Almighty God as His minister, as His immediate attendant, who has to minister about His sacred person; to transact, as it were, His most sacred affairs. "He is appointed," says St. Paul, "for the things which relate to God." He is the ambassador of God, the mediator between Him and His people; and hence the greatest sanctity, the most perfect purity, ought to distinguish him from all others. "I have chosen you," says Almighty God, "and separated you from others, that you should be entirely mine." And again, "I will be sanctified in them that approach me." The persons who have to assist about the throne of an earthly king are expected to preserve the utmost cleanliness in their person and dress, and the least stain upon their garments would in them be considered an unpardonable offence; but how much more hateful must the least stain of sin be in the ministers of the altar? How far more abominable in the sight of God must the least defilement of impurity be, in His ministers, than in ordinary Christians? A priest is appointed to offer the most august and adorable sacrifice of the altar, the most sacred Body and Blood of the Lamb of God. Now we know that the priests who had to offer sacrifice in the old law were

required to be most pure and holy. "They shall be holy," says the sacred Scripture, "because they offer incense and bread to the Lord." How far more requisite then must purity be in the priest of the new law, who has to offer, in sacrifice, the spotless Lamb of God? "If," says the venerable Bellarmine, "such great sanctity was required in the priests, who offered only bulls and sheep, what must be required in them who offer up the divine Lamb?" "That hand," says St. Chrysostom, "which touches the sacred flesh of Jesus Christ, and the tongue which is empurpled with His adorable blood, ought to be more pure than the rays of the sun;" and, in another place, he says, "The priest who ascends the altar to offer sacrifice ought to be so pure and holy as to merit a place amidst the very angels of heaven." "Where is the wretch so impious," cries out St. Augustine, "that would dare to touch the adorable Sacrament of the altar with unclean and impure hands?" And yet a priest who should offer up this tremendous sacrifice, stained with the vice of impurity, would be far more guilty in the sight of God. The priest, then, who approaches the altar ought to be most pure, most holy, for to him are these words particularly addressed: "Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy." We look for an especial holiness and sanctity in all the actions of seculars who receive the holy Communion two or three times a week; we require that they should, in a special manner, be free from all defilement of sin. How far greater, then, ought to be the purity and holiness of the priest, who, each day, stands at the altar of God, to offer up the great sacrifice of Calvary? How horrible would it be to see any immodesty

in him? We read in Holy Scripture that King Baltasser and Antiochus, who presumed to carry away the sacred vessels of the temple of Jerusalem, and to apply them to common and profane uses, became, on that account, most infamous and abominable in the sight of God; but how far more guilty in His sight is the priest who pollutes and defiles his own body, that living vessel which has been consecrated and set aside for the divine service in a most solemn manner! For besides the obligations of chastity, which the priest undertakes in receiving the sub-deaconship, he is in a more especial manner dedicated to a life of purity by the sacred anointing which takes place at his ordination. His hands are then consecrated by the sacred chrism, to be employed henceforth in the service of God alone, that he may be altogether pure and holy, and spotless in his sight.

But if the office of a priest, considered in reference to God, shows the special obligation which he has of leading a pure and chaste life, the same is no less evident when we consider it in reference to the people, to the mystical body of Christ. What is the relation which exists between the pastor and the faithful? Our blessed Saviour most clearly marked this out to his apostles when He said to them, "You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world." *First*, the priest must be *the salt of the earth;* that is to say, it is the priest's duty to preserve the people as much as possible pure from the corruption of sin. The great property of salt, as we know, is to preserve things free from corruption; and so our Saviour would signify, that one most important duty of His ministers is to sanctify the earth, to preserve it from all the defilements and corruption of sin.

Now we know that the vice of impurity is itself corruption, and, therefore, one infected by it, instead of preserving the earth from the fatal evil of sin, only spreads the disease more and more. If the priest become himself corruption, how is it possible that he can preserve others from contamination? If the salt lose its savour, it is of no more use, but is fit only to be cast away. Hence, St. Liguori, speaking of this horrible vice, calls it the pest of the world, a fatal plague, that spreads corruption on every side.

Secondly, the priest must be "*the light of the world;*" and that in many ways. First, he must be the light of the world by becoming, as it were, a bright luminary to others by his good example. Our blessed Redeemer, speaking to His apostles, said, "Let your light so shine before men that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." Such is our vocation, our high calling; and if we fail in this, if we do not become models of virtue to those over whom we are placed, we shall be destitute of one of the most essential qualifications required in the ministers of Jesus Christ. But how can we possibly become models of holiness and sanctity, how can we become luminaries to direct others in the practice of virtue, if we do not excel in holy purity? Secondly, the priest must be the light of the world, by his teaching, by pointing out to the people the true way which leads to eternal life, by instructing them in true heavenly wisdom, in the science of the saints. But how can he who is given to earthly and sensual pleasures be able to draw others from vice, and to lead them to the love of supernatural and heavenly things? How can he be endued with that fervour and

unction which are necessary to make a strong and lasting impression on the heart? No, it will only be an illusion to think of drawing others to the love of God and of spiritual things, unless we ourselves be animated by this holy love.

No wonder, then, that the Church is, and has ever been, most strict in requiring perfect purity in those who aspire to the service of the altar; and that she has always been most watchful over the purity and chastity of her consecrated ministers. It is from this sense of the dignity of the office, and the awful responsibility which it involves for the sanctification of other souls, that the sacred canons require that those who consecrate themselves to God, in the service of His church, should be possessed of a solid habit of purity before being admitted to sacred orders. St. Gregory says, "Let not hands be imposed upon any one, unless he has been for many years faithful in the practice of continence;" and Innocent III. says, "Let no man be promoted to the priesthood, unless he be a virgin or a man of approved chastity." The Council of Trent is also express upon this subject. "Let the bishops know that they may not impose their hands upon any one unless he be old in virtue;" which signifies, that although the person to be ordained may be young in years, he must be already old in the practice of virtue, and must have already acquired a solid habit of chastity.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God. . . . . But the spiritual man judgeth all things." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

THE angelic doctor, St. Thomas, teaches, that the sensual appetite, when freely indulged, always produces blindness of mind and hardness of heart.

First, it produces *blindness of mind.* All vices obscure the powers of the mind in some degree, but the vice of impurity does so more speedily and more completely than any other. Some spiritual writers apply to this subject those words of David: "The fire fell, and they could not see the sun." When the atmosphere is covered with thick and gloomy clouds, we can no longer distinguish the blue vault of heaven, and behold the rays of the sun; and so, in like manner, when the soul of man is a prey to the passion of lust, and filled with the filthy clouds of evil desires, he loses sight of the things of heaven, and hence, what before appeared to him lovely and excellent, becomes in his sight of no value; for his judgment is now perverted, and he is wholly led by his unruly passions. We have many facts, illustrative of this blindness, produced by the sin of lust, in Holy Scripture. Witness the elders who tempted the chaste Susanna; these were men of the first rank in the city, persons who held

(a) Wis. i. 4. (b) 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15.

the chief offices of state; the supreme judges of the people, and, unquestionably endowed with many high qualities; but no sooner do they become slaves to this passion of lust, than they lose all prudence, and are reckless of their dignity; they forget their high station, and think only of indulging their criminal desires, despising what is holy and just and good. Behold, again, King Solomon, gifted by God with wisdom, such as had been granted to no other mortal; yet, even he, when he abandoned himself to the desires of the flesh, forgot his wisdom, and the many favours and blessings he had received from God, and became so foolish as to offer incense to false gods. These examples may show how much this vice blinds the mind of man, robbing him of the natural light, and making him forget his dignity as a rational creature: and if it is so ruinous to man as a rational being, what will it be to the Christian and to the religious?

Secondly, it produces *hardness of heart.* The man who abandons himself to sensual passions becomes, by degrees, insensible to everything which might promote his salvation and eternal happiness. First, he becomes insensible to supernatural pleasure, for this is directly opposed to carnal pleasure. Secondly, he becomes insensible to good advice, and disregards the admonitions and reproofs of his friends and superiors. Hence, few of those who fall victims to the devil of impurity are permanently reclaimed and brought back to the way of virtue.

No wonder, therefore, that the saints so dreaded everything contrary to purity, as to shudder at the very shadow of defilement, not only in themselves, but also in others. The blessed Sebastian

Valfrè was so particular in this point, that he repelled from the confessional and from the eucharistic table even the most noble ladies, if they presented themselves indecorously dressed, and would accept no excuse that they might make, as to the extreme heat, or the fashion of the time. Meeting one of his nieces in a public and much-frequented street, in a dress that seemed to him immodest, he took out his handkerchief and threw it over her, although she was at some distance, telling her to cover herself better, which she did without making any reply. He mortified yet more one of his sisters, for having come from Verduno to Turin in time of war, while Piedmont was full of troops. When she asked to see him, he shuddered with horror at the danger in which she had placed herself on the road; and sent her a severe reproof, without going himself to see her. At length, several persons of authority having interposed, he spoke to her once, on condition that she would immediately return home. In the few moments of the interview, he again reproved her for her rashness in undertaking the journey under such circumstances, and then sent her back, with suitable companions.

Another thing which the blessed Sebastian had greatly at heart was, the decorum of weddings. The following is a letter which he wrote on this subject to a physician, Pompeo Berlototti, when about to be married: "As at the marriage of Cana," says he, "Jesus and Mary were visibly present, so I hope that at your nuptials they will be invisibly present, to give them their blessing. I feel assured, that the modesty of the two persons principally concerned, no less than that

of the guests, will on this day be exemplary, every one recollecting that the Son of God chose to ennoble the conjugal state by raising it to the divine excellence of a sacrament; calling to mind, also, that in the espousals of Christians, the church recognizes her own espousals with Jesus. At table, amid the common mirth, let each one, from time to time, reflect, that the Institutor of marriage is, through His immensity, there present, and that he has to give to Him, a strict account of every word, and of every even the minutest act, which is not according to His most holy law. In this way will the day be one of real gladness; for then only will you be truly joyous, when you do well: in sin, no one can find true happiness."

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"No price is worthy of a continent soul." [a]—*The Wise Man.*
"I charge thee before God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by declining to either side. . . . . Keep thyself chaste." [b]—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

As we are bound to love God with our whole heart, and with our whole soul, and with our whole mind, so we are obliged to cultivate chastity with all our powers. First of all, we must cultivate purity in our mind, which we must do in three ways: first, by entertaining the highest esteem of this virtue. We should look upon it

[a] Ecclus. xxvi. 20. [b] 1 Tim. v. 21, 22.

as the most precious jewel, the most invaluable ornament of our holy state; as a hidden treasure to be purchased at any price, at any sacrifice; and we should be anxious to adopt every means to gain as clear an insight as possible into its immense value, for the more deeply the knowledge and esteem of purity becomes fixed in our hearts, the more carefully shall we watch over ourselves for fear of losing it. Secondly, we must cultivate mental purity, by expelling, as soon as possible, every thought calculated to sully or tarnish this virtue. In natural things, we all see how necessary it is to free ourselves immediately from all that is dangerous to us. Thus, if a spark of fire falls upon our clothes, we instantly shake it off, lest it should burn us; if we see a serpent or furious beast in our path, we immediately turn aside or flee; and if some one were to present to us a cup of poison, most certainly we should not stop to ask ourselves whether we will taste it, but should rather instantly reject it. Such must be our conduct in what regards purity. We must instantly flee from everything that may offend this angelic virtue, for even a thought, wilfully entertained, as faith teaches, would defile our soul, and would expose our salvation to great risks; hence, as soon as we perceive the least temptation, contrary to purity, rising in our minds, we must immediately oppose it, otherwise it will gain strength, and we shall find it more difficult to subdue it afterwards; for, from the corruption of our nature, we are violently bent upon sensual gratification; hence, if we dwell wilfully upon the temptation, it will gradually become stronger, whereas, by resisting and opposing it in the beginning, it is easily vanquished.

As long as we keep the devil at a distance, we may easily repel his suggestions, and overcome his solicitations; but if he is once allowed to enter the mind, he soon finds his way to the heart, and then it is most difficult to drive him away. Thirdly, we must cultivate purity in our mind by cherishing the greatest horror and dread of everything that may defile the purity of our souls. If we do this with perseverance, we shall have one of the most powerful preservatives against the temptations of the enemy; for, as long as the soul feels a horror of the vice of impurity, the devil will find it impossible to make any impression upon it; he must destroy this feeling before he can obtain any power over the affections. And, indeed, were Almighty God pleased to reveal to us why so many fall a prey to the enemy after a short resistance, and why others, on the contrary, continue firm and unshaken in the path of purity, after long and most violent assaults, we should see that the former fall because they have conceived little or no dread of this vice, and were therefore inclined to yield before being tempted; whereas the latter owed their constancy and fidelity in the way of holiness, to the horror they felt for everything calculated to defile their hearts. A man of the first class resembles a city without fortifications or any means of defence, which therefore yields to the enemy almost without a struggle; while one of the latter class resembles an impregnable fortress, defended with strong walls and ramparts on every side, which consequently defies all the assaults of the enemy. Horror and hatred of the least stain of impurity is then most necessary for all who would preserve

themselves pure and undefiled, and where this dread does not exist, there the soul is on the brink of ruin.

We read of the venerable Berchmans, that he had the greatest horror even of the shadow of impurity. His delicacy on this point made him watchful over all his movements, both by day and night. In order to keep the spirit of darkness at a distance, he besought the angels and His holy patrons to watch over him whilst he slept; he armed himself with the sign of the cross, and placed his crucifix opposite to him, that Jesus, the author of all purity, might be his sovereign protector. As his last thought before he slept was holy, so likewise was his first upon waking; he began and finished the day, by profound adoration of the blessed Trinity, and by an act of homage to the queen of angels, whom he reverenced as the grand protectress of his chastity. He was particularly diligent in the practice of those virtues which are most closely connected with purity, contending with his enemies incessantly. "I will wage war against them," said he, "and will never rest until I have destroyed them." Idleness, pride, and gluttony, were vices he most vehemently denounced, because he believed them to be most dangerous to purity. However great his love might be for all his rules, he was most solicitous about those which referred to purity, they being in fact its guardians. This angelic virtue was the brightest ornament of his life; he had loved it from his infancy, and its brilliancy in him was never tarnished in the slightest degree.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"If there be joy in the world, certainly the man whose heart is pure has it; and if there be anywhere tribulation and anguish, an evil conscience feels the worst of it. As iron put into the fire loses the rust, and becomes itself fire, so a man that turns himself wholly to God puts off his sluggishness, and is changed into a new man."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

Those who keep a constant watch over their heart, and preserve it free from the defilement of the flesh, cannot but enjoy great peace here, and eternal happiness hereafter. They enjoy great peace here, because holy purity on the one side removes from their hearts the sources of wretchedness and misery; and on the other, infuses into them the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding. Worldly men think to find their happiness in the enjoyment of sensual gratifications; but they are deceived, for carnal pleasures come from a corrupted fountain, whose poisonous streams fill the heart with bitterness, and increase its misery. If, instead of taking our proper natural food, we should attempt to satisfy hunger with filth and dirt, we should only add to our wretchedness, and ruin our constitution; so the pleasures of sense being an unnatural food for the affections of man as a rational and intelligent being, instead of bringing him happiness, can only add to the misery of his fallen state. Now

(a) Prov. iv. 23.

it is a property of holy purity to remove from the heart of man inordinate passions, and to infuse into it divine charity, which is the true source of happiness. And truly the more a person purifies himself from the infections of the flesh, the more God pours Himself without limitation into his soul, and fills him with the greatest happiness. God is, as it were, the sun which shines upon man, and sensual pleasures are clouds which cover his soul; when then these clouds are dispersed, the sun of justice pours in his beneficent and enriching rays, and fills him with the riches of his grace. Deeply impressed with this truth, the saints spared no pains in the cultivation of holy purity. In this the venerable Benedict Labré, deserves a particular mention. His purity was so perfect, that many called him, in the processes of his beatification, an angel in human flesh, an angelical youth, another St. Aloysius, and one who might have said with St. Paul, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh."(a) From his most tender years he ever guarded this beautiful virtue with the greatest jealousy, and gave the greatest proofs of the desire he had to preserve it unsullied by any pestilential breath in his contact with the world. A young woman, once seeing him very modest and composed, in the house of a fellow-student, said, in joke, to see if she could disturb him: "Hold him, I am going to kiss him." But scarcely had Benedict heard the words, than he fled from the place, as he would have done if he had seen a horrible serpent darting upon him—"*Quasi a facie colubri*," as the Holy Spirit

(a) 2 Cor. x. 3.

teaches—making himself a source of laughter to some, of admiration to others.

To preserve this precious lily in the interior garden of his soul, he kept at all times a strict watch over his senses,—the doors by which the infernal serpent seeks to gain an entrance, either to root up this flower, or to cause it to wither by his pestiferous touch. Hence, Benedict walked in the streets as if he were praying in the church, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his hands folded on his breast. The magnificence of the Roman palaces, the variety of the fountains, obelisks, and curiosities, which usually attract the eyes of all, could not divert his attention; he always walked like a person in an ecstasy, and never turned his head, or raised his eyes. The sight only of his modesty excited devotion, and sufficed to persuade men that he was a saint.

All the time that Barbara Sori gave him a lodging in her house at Loretto, he never once looked her in the face; he spoke to her and answered her with his eyes cast down, and with such modesty and humility, that his words always increased her devotion, and strengthened her opinion, that he was indeed a holy soul. She attests that it was a subject of admiration to those who stopped by chance in the streets to give him an alms or speak to him, to see him with his eyes cast down, and his hands crossed on his breast, answering only what was necessary, in few and well-considered words, and then departing, as soon as he could disengage himself, going on his way, quite recollected in himself. A woman who wished to see his eyes and hear him speak, once stopping him in the street, offered him an alms, but he continued with his eyes fixed on the

ground, and his arms folded on his breast, without speaking. Being urged to accept the alms, he extended his hand. Wishing to engage him in conversation, she told him to recommend her to God on account of some troubles; to this, Benedict, without either opening his eyes, or uttering a word, gave her a sign, merely bowing his head, and then went away. Another, who often gave him an alms, being moved to do it by his modesty and devotion, deposes, "that though she had seen him for many years, she could not tell what sort of eyes he had, as he always received the alms without looking her in the face." Many other persons who assisted him by alms spoke to the same effect.

He was not less cautious in the custody of the ears and other senses. An immodest word, which he heard by chance, was a sound which filled him with horror. Once, a little girl, of about six years of age, was in her play in the public street singing a rather light song; Benedict was walking along the road, and scarcely had he heard the first words, than horrified, he uttered a loud cry close to her, and asked her repeatedly if she knew the Pater Noster; the poor little girl was so astonished, that she had not courage to answer him. One of the reasons for which he avoided the company of other beggars, and often omitted also to go and receive soup at the doors of the convents, was, that he might not hear immodest words, which such people too frequently utter, either in jest, or through anger in their quarrels.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels." (a)—*Holy David.*

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

CHASTITY is a treasure of inestimable value; it is of such high and sublime excellence as to surpass the comprehension, not only of men, but of the highest angels; its true worth is known only to God Himself; hence holy Scripture says, How lovely is that soul which is pure and spotless; its beauty is inestimable. But we must remember that we have this rich treasure in frail vessels, as the apostle declares that we carry it in our own weak nature; and hence we must use the greatest diligence for its preservation. A slight neglect may cause us to forfeit it, or tarnish its beauty and brilliant lustre.

One thing which should excite us to guard this virtue with the utmost diligence is to recollect what all the saints teach of the combat we have to endure against impurity; that it is the most violent and the most dangerous one to which we can be exposed. St. Augustine calls it *durum certamen*, "a hard and difficult fight." We must not, therefore, give way to sloth and indifference, but we must be ready to exert every nerve in this deadly struggle; we must use the utmost diligence if we wish to gain the victory. This diligence

(a) Psalms l. 12. (b) 2 Cor. iv. 7.

must be used by all, even by those who have already attained a high degree of sanctity; and though they should have worked the most stupendous miracles, or been raised like the great St. Paul to the third heaven. St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and many other holy fathers, declare that many persons who have lived for years in the practice of virtue, leading the lives of angels rather than of men, and whose hearts seemed raised above all created objects, as the stars are elevated above this lower world, have, through carelessness, thinking that they were no longer to fear the attacks of this enemy, on a sudden fallen into the depths of sin, and though they seemed deeply rooted in virtue, like the tall cedars on the mountains of Libanus, have been in a moment prostrated and overthrown.

A holy man has very justly compared chastity to a looking-glass, which is tarnished by the least human breath, for thus the vapour of concupiscence quickly tarnishes chastity, and makes it lose all its lustre; hence it is that we ought to be very careful in mortifying our senses, rejecting every evil thought as soon as it arises, and carefully avoiding everything from which we may apprehend danger. Where a fire is kindled some mark is always left behind, and, though it does not burn, it blackens. In the same manner, some things which do not absolutely burn us, yet do not fail to create in our souls black and cloudy thoughts, repugnant to chastity.

It is an admirable saying of St. Ignatius, that whatever regards chastity admits of no interpretation. No one must trust himself in this case, nor presume that he can go so far and no farther without danger, for how can any one be sure

there is no danger? Yet suppose he were, I would fain know whether he can promise himself not to transgress those bounds he has prescribed, since the least thought may carry him farther than he is aware. When we walk upon slippery ground and down the hill, we go very cautiously, step by step, and though we propose only to go a certain distance, the weight of our body and the nature of the ground often carries us farther. So it is with chastity; every step we make is on slippery ground, and the corruption of nature hangs so heavily upon us, that it easily carries us beyond our mark. In fine, chastity is so delicate, that the least thing wounds it; and, therefore, we ought to be extremely cautious not to expose it to danger. It is a rich treasure which we carry in earthen vessels, and if these be once broken, all is lost; we must, therefore, be very attentive and vigilant in shunning all contact with impurity.

A certain religious, who was favoured by God with the gift of chastity, never omitted his former care and moderation, both in his looks and words; and was extremely vigilant in avoiding the least occasion of unclean thoughts. The religious of the monastery once asked him, why, since God had favoured him with the gift of chastity, he was so much upon his guard? He answered: "If in the smallest matters I endeavour to do what I ought, and to act as well as I can, God will give His grace to carry me through greater trials; whereas, should I neglect my duty in the former, it is more than I know whether God's grace will assist me in the latter; I should, at least, hereby deserve to be forsaken by Him, and so to fall into sin. I keep continual watch

over myself in what seems small and inconsiderable, because I am resolved to do what lies in me, to discharge my duty." Surius says, that St. Thomas of Aquin, though he had received the gift of chastity, and had been assured by an angel that he would never lose it, yet made it his continual care to mortify himself, and to banish from his mind every thought whence the least impression of impurity might arise.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"In the assaults of lust, take thyself to flight, if thou wilt gain the victory."—*St. Austin.*

"In the warfare of the flesh, cowards, who take flight, come off the best, and gain the victory."—*St. Philip.*

The saints unanimously teach, that in order to preserve immaculate the lily of purity, we must carefully avoid the occasion of sin, shunning those objects which are calculated to inflame our lust. On this point let no one presume on his own strength, but let him rather fear, considering those words of holy Scripture: "He who loves danger shall perish in it." How often has the devil of lust achieved in an unguarded instant what he could not effect for many years!

"It must be observed," says the author of the Spiritual Combat, "and every day's experience shows it, that the greatest danger exists in attachments in which there is no appearance of

evil, because founded on the plausible pretence of kindred, gratitude, obligation, or, in fine, on the merit or virtue of the person beloved. Impure inclinations imperceptibly insinuate themselves into such friendships by frequent visits, too long conversations, and indiscreet familiarities; till, at length, the poison reaches the heart, reason is so far blinded as to connive at amorous glances, tender expressions, and jocose liberties in discourse, and violent and almost irresistible temptations follow.

"Fly, therefore, with the utmost caution, all occasions of this sin, of the flames of which you are more susceptible than straw is of fire. Rely not on your own virtue, or a resolution you may have taken, rather to die than offend God; for, however well disposed you may be to virtue, the frequency of such betwitching conversation will kindle a fire not to be extinguished. An impetuous desire of satisfying your passion will render you deaf to the remonstrances of your friends; you will lose the fear of God; reputation, and even life itself, will be set at nought; nay, the sight of the flames of hell will not master the fury of those sensual fires kindled within your breast. Seek, therefore, your safety by flying: there is no other way of escaping, since a too great confidence will end in eternal perdition." Let no one imagine that even the love which is most pure, and which is founded only on virtue and merit, is free from danger; for, however pious the conversation may be—however likely to promote spiritual advancement, yet there is ever cause to fear, and no one can be too much on his guard. The reason is, because all holy doctors say, that spiritual love easily degenerates

into that which is carnal and sensual. How many, says St. Bonaventure, have begun their friendship under the appearance of piety, imagining that their only object was the service of God and their own salvation? And, perhaps, this really was the case at first; yet, afterwards, this virtuous and holy friendship degenerated by little and little, and entertainments not altogether spiritual crept in; thus what was begun spiritually ended carnally.

Gerson relates a story of a holy man, no less commendable for his learning than virtue, who instructing for some time a young woman of great sanctity, and having had many pious discourses with her, came at last to conceive such a violent affection for her, that he could not refrain from paying her very frequent and long visits, and had her, when absent, always in his thoughts. Though an affection of this nature could not be from God, yet, as he thought he had no bad intention (in which particular many are deluded and blinded), he was so far beguiled that he did not believe there was any harm at all, or any illusion of the devil in it. Nay, he persisted in this error, till being once obliged to take a long journey, he found, by the great difficulty he felt in leaving her, that his kindness for her was not so spiritual as he imagined, and that had not God by this absence taken him from the occasion, he was on the very point of falling into very great disorders. The same Gerson, speaking of the dangers and illusions of love, says, that everything which has the appearance of charity is not charity; that all is not gold that glitters; and adds, that a holy man used to say, that nothing caused so much diffidence and fear in him as love, even between

persons of great sanctity and eminent virtue; and to this purpose he cites these words of the wise man: "There is a way that seems right to a man, and yet it leads to death;" and such, says he, is the course of which we are speaking.

Who can read the unhappy fall of James the Hermit, and not be seized with wonder and amazement? This man was threescore years old, forty of which he had spent in continual austerities; he was even famous for the many miracles he had wrought, and God had given him the power of casting out devils. Having one day cured a young woman who was possessed by the devil, and finding that the persons who brought her to him were afraid to take her home with them, for fear the devil should repossess her, he consented that she should stay some time with him; and because he was too confident, and presumed too much upon his own strength, God permitted him to fall into sin with her; then, as one sin usually draws on another, fear of being discovered made him murder her, and throw her body into a river. To conclude all, despairing of God's mercy, he left his solitude, went into the world again, and gave himself over to all manner of wickedness, till, at last, entering into himself, he merited, by a severe penance of ten years, to be restored to the state and sanctity from which he had fallen.

The saints of God well understood the frailty of man, hence they avoided, with the greatest care, whatever was calculated to offend, even in the slightest degree, the lily of purity. Thus acted the blessed Leonard, who constantly fled from every occasion, however remote, which might excite in his heart the least desire that was not perfectly

pure. He avoided all needless conversation with women, and whenever they came to consult him, he stood before them with his eyes cast down, and dismissed them as soon as the business was ended, even if they happened to be ladies of the highest rank and distinction. Although his usual manner in conversation was easy and pleasant, with women he was always grave, and almost severe, carefully avoiding every expression which might seem too familiar and tender, and giving his advice with seriousness and earnestness, according as he deemed it best for the good of their souls. His companion used to say to him, that with some very devout ladies he might spend a little more of his time, and not be so austere; but he always replied: "Brother, supposing they say I am uncivil, rough, and harsh, what does it matter? With regard to personal purity, we cannot be too cautious or too watchful over ourselves." On another occasion he said: "Know you not that the lily is more secure the more it is surrounded by thorns? If those ladies were somewhat annoyed by my harshness, it matters not, for they will eventually be edified, and purity will be well guarded." Whenever he was obliged to converse with women, he occupied his mind with some good thought; and he used to say, for the instruction of others, that when a religious is obliged to speak to women, he ought to act as those do who are exposed to infection; although they cannot fly from those sick of infectious disorders, they may hold in their hand some perfume, which will prevent their taking the disease; and the religious, who has to converse with women, should make use of the perfume of holy thoughts to keep himself from danger.

One of his maxims was, that the virtue of chastity must be practised by every one, but especially by those who are employed in leading souls to God; for the shadow even of the contrary vice is sufficient to destroy all the good effects of teaching: he also used to say, that it is not sufficient for a missionary to be pure in the sight of God, but he must appear so in the eyes of the world, for it is good to give evidence always of his holy life.

He never permitted any women to touch his hand, and when the people used to press round him in the towns through which he passed, to kiss his hand, he presented his habit or his cloak, and without ever stopping. For this reason he wore his cloak in the hottest weather, to his great personal inconvenience, as he said, with great simplicity, on being asked why he burdened himself with it: "These simple people wish to kiss my hand, and there are many women amongst them; and although I keep my hand in my sleeve, they try to take hold of it, which displeases me much, because I do not think it according to holy purity, that a religious should allow, even on the score of devotion, his hand to be touched, especially by a woman. I wear my cloak, that they may kiss it, and I may be free from the danger of being touched by any of them." His modesty was so perfect, that walking always with his eyes cast down, and with singular composure, he breathed holiness in his deportment, so that many declared they felt touched with compunction on beholding him; and others, who knew him well for many years, affirmed, that in every word, action, and gesture, his modesty shone resplendent. In his instructions to young

men he used to say: "If you are not modest and discreet, you cannot be chaste; those who sin against holy purity begin by being indiscreet."

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"Watch and pray, lest you fall into temptation." [a]—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"As soon as we feel ourselves attacked by lust, let us turn our mind and heart to God, and say to him, 'Aid me, O God, my helper.'"—*St. Jerome.*

All virtues stand in need of frequent and fervent prayer for their preservation, but especially holy purity requires it for its safety; for, as the combat which we must sustain against the devil of lust is most fearful, and requires a special energy, so we must necessarily more carefully arm ourselves with the weapon of prayer, if we wish to gain the victory. Hence the wise man says: "As I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it . . . . . I turned to the Lord and besought Him." [b]

St. Augustine suggests, as a very useful prayer against the temptations of the flesh, to meditate frequently on our Saviour's passion, putting ourselves in His sacred wounds. "There is no remedy," says he, "so powerful against the heat of concupiscence as the remembrance of our

[a] Matt. xxvi. 41. [b] Wis. viii. 20

Saviour's passion. In all my difficulties I never found anything so efficacious as the wounds of Christ. In them I sleep secure; from them I derive new life." A grave doctor observes, that the Gospel, speaking of the wound in our Saviour's side, does not say that Christ was wounded in the side, but that "a soldier opened his side with a lance," as if it would signify to us, that the way to the heart of Jesus is now open, and that we ought to retire thither, as into the holes of a rock and caverns of a hill. St. Bernard proposes the same remedy to us in this manner: As soon as you feel any temptation of impurity, apply yourself to think on the passion of the Saviour of the world, and make the following act: "My God is nailed to a cross, and shall I admit of these most unlawful pleasures?" Thus, the faithful Urias, when he came from the army to give David an account of the siege of Rabba, would not, though greatly fatigued, sleep in his own house, and when asked the reason, answered David: "The ark of God and the people of Israel and Juda are still in the camp; Joab, my general, with a great many more of your servants, sleep upon the ground, and shall I go, eat, drink, and sleep with my wife? I swear by your sacred life and my own, that I will never do it." Let us imitate his zeal, and say, as he did: "Lord, You are fastened to a cross, to atone by Your sufferings for man's sinful pleasures; I am resolved, therefore, not to give myself up to that pleasure, which cost you so dear."

Whenever you find yourself tempted, says St. Francis of Sales, imitate the example of little children, who, at the sight of a wolf or bear, run to the arms of their parents, or at least,

call to them for help and protection. Run thus to the arms of Jesus, and invoke his merciful aid and protection; this is the resource pointed out to us by our blessed Lord: "Pray, lest you enter into temptation." Should the temptation continue, and especially if it become more violent, embrace in spirit the foot of the sacred cross, as though you beheld Jesus Christ agonizing before you; protest in His Divine Presence that you do not, and will never consent to the temptation; implore Him to defend you from the enemy, and continue this exercise as long as the combat continues. But while you are thus engaged, look not on the temptation; look upon Jesus; for should you dwell too much on the temptation, particularly if it be violent, it might shake your courage.

Turn your thoughts to some other subject, and engage in some good and laudable occupation, in order to obviate the impressions made by the temptation.

Other servants of God, when tempted, have helped themselves, by remembering in general the four last things, as the wise man advises: "In all thy actions remember thy last things, and thou wilt not sin." Several, also, have made use of the consideration of hell in particular, and seriously weighed that saying of St. Gregory: "Pleasure is momentary, but the punishment due to it is eternal." And, without doubt, to "descend alive into hell," by an act of faith, and to consider the torments there, which shall never end, but last as long as God shall be God, is a means very proper to prevent our falling into sin. There are others who have found much comfort and assistance from the contemplation of eternal glory, by reflecting

what folly and madness it is, to lose that and God for all eternity, only for a moment's pleasure; and to neglect those things to which God invites us, and to which He has inseparably annexed such glorious rewards, in order to comply with the solicitations of the devil, which will infallibly be punished in endless pains. Others have found much profit from the consideration of death and the last judgment.

It is also a very excellent remedy against suggestions of impurity, to turn our mind in prayer to our Blessed Lady. For she being herself most pure and immaculate, and a virgin by pre-eminence, is particularly inclined to assist those who call upon her in order to maintain their purity. Some doctors, speaking of the Baptist's extraordinary purity, which he always kept free from the least stain of sin, ascribe it to the visit our Blessed Lady paid to St. Elizabeth, and to her three months' stay with her: "This visit," says St. Ambrose, "related no less to his soul than to his body; for the Blessed Virgin's acquaintance with her cousin Elizabeth was not the only thing which kept her so long at Hebron, but the advantage so great a prophet was to reap from thence, was partly the cause of her stay." "For, if upon her first arrival the Baptist was sanctified, and leaped for joy in his mother's womb—if, upon the first salutation, St. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost—what benefit, think you," continues St. Ambrose, "did not three months' presence yield both to the mother and to the son?" Father Avila says, that he himself has seen several wonderful effects of this devotion to our Lady in various persons, who said prayers in memory of that purity in which the Blessed

Virgin was conceived, and of that also with which she conceived and brought forth the Saviour of the world; such persons have been freed by this devotion from filthy temptations, which had for a long time tormented them.

It is also a devotion, no less commendable than powerful, against unchaste thoughts, frequently to prostrate one's self before the blessed Sacrament, and to beg God's grace to overcome them. But, above all, there is nothing contributes so much to the obtaining of this grace as frequent communion, since our Saviour himself has prepared that table against all those who persecute us. And all saints and holy writers agree, that the blessed Sacrament is not only a great remedy against all temptations in general, but particularly sovereign against impurity; for it deadens the fuel of sin, checks the motions of concupiscence, and extinguishes the ardour of sensuality, as water extinguishes fire. And hence it is, that St. Cyril, with other holy fathers, applies to this adorable Sacrament of the altar that passage of Zacharias: "What is His goodness, and what His beauty, but in being the bread of the elect, and the wine that produceth virgins."(a) To prayer we must unite the practice of mortification. St. Francis said, he knew by experience, that the devils fled from those that led severe and penitential lives; and, on the contrary, that they easily set upon those that pampered their flesh. And St. Athanasius writes, that St. Anthony used to say to his monks: "Believe me, brethren, the devil is afraid of the prayers of men; he dreads their watchings, fasts,

(a) Zach. ix. 17.

and voluntary poverty." St. Ambrose, applying to this subject these words of the Psalmist: "I have covered my soul with fasting, and my garment is haircloth," says, that fasting, and other rigours used on the body, are very good defensive weapons against the assaults of the devil.

A religious, that was much troubled with temptations against holy purity, one day asking holy brother Giles how he might be freed from them, received this answer:—"Pray, brother, what would you do to a dog that was going to bite you?" "I would either take up a stick or a stone," says the other, "and not cease beating him till I made him run away." "Very well," replied the good brother, "do the same to your flesh, which is always barking at you, and the temptation will fly from you."

We read of the venerable Joseph Anchiéta, that, perceiving that the baseness and immorality of the persons amongst whom he was exercising the missionary office, waged a continual war against his innocence and modesty, he combated it by endeavouring, as far as possible, to forget his body, and all that concerned it, applying his every thought to the care and custody of his soul; he found it necessary to curb all his inclinations and feelings, and to mortify his appetites, and treat much with God in holy contemplation, that he might not be overcome by the sight of the indelicate objects which were continually presented to his eyes. The ordinary helps to which he had recourse, were, first, to give but a small part of the night to sleep, all the rest being spent in prayer. Secondly, never to lose sight of the presence of God throughout the day; and if dangers increased, he likewise increased his fervent attention to this holy exercise.

Thirdly, he added rigorous fasts, and other macerations of the body; by which means our passions are generally moderated, and our souls rendered more free to fly in affection towards God. Above all things, he recommended himself with his whole heart to our Blessed Lady, to whom he had long before dedicated himself; and under whose protection he felt sure that he should pass unscathed through the Babylonian furnace, and that not so much as one of its black vapours should be able to tarnish in the least the purity of his soul.

THIRTIETH DAY.

"This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting." (1)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"If you desire to be chaste, be retired, be modest, and mortified."—*Blessed Leonard.*

The vigilance which is necessary for the preservation of holy purity, consists especially in watching over the feelings of our heart and the senses of our body. We must ever remember that, as it is our duty to love God with our whole heart, so we are bound to keep it pure and free from all defilement. For this purpose, it is most important that we should vigorously resist and reject all sensual feelings, as soon as we perceive them. "If the temptations are those of feelings," says St. Francis of Sales, "we must make some

(1) Matt. xxvi. 41.

change in bodily exercise when distressed by them; or, if this cannot conveniently be done, let us try a change of place or posture: such changes will turn aside the thoughts to something else.

"If the temptation is in the imagination, let us sing, keep with others, change spiritual exercise, that is to say, pass from one kind to another; and changes of place will be an additional help: above all, let us not be startled at these temptations, but frequently renew our promises, and humble ourselves before God. Let us promise ourselves the victory, by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. If, after all, the temptation still continues to assail and harass us, we have simply to continue, with determined courage, to refuse it the consent of our heart. A maiden cannot be married so long as she says no; nor can the soul be overcome by temptation as long as she, in like manner, says no.

"Dispute not with your enemy, nor make him any reply, unless it be that by which our blessed Saviour put him to flight: 'Begone, Satan; the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.' A chaste wife repels at once the foul seducer; she spurns his advances, and will not so much as look at or speak to him in reply. She turns her heart towards her husband, and renews the sentiments of fidelity which she has vowed to him. In like manner, the devout soul, when assailed by the enemy, must not stop to reply to him, nor to dispute with his temptations, but simply turn herself towards her divine Spouse, Jesus Christ, and fervently renew her protestations of inviolable fidelity to Him alone and for ever."

To the watchfulness over the feelings of the heart, we must unite a holy vigilance over the senses of our body, and especially over our eyes and tongue. "Turn away thy face," says the Holy Ghost, "from a woman in her ornaments, and gaze not about another's beauty, for many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire." (a) "The look," writes St. Austin, "is followed by the thought, the thought is followed by pleasure, and the pleasure is followed by consent. . . . . Don't tell me that you are chaste in soul, if you are not so in your looks." St. Gregory gives this counsel: "Never to cast our eyes upon that which it is forbidden us to desire, for it is much to be feared that the object will captivate our hearts by means of our curiosity, and, when we least think, we shall be unfortunately surprised."

Holy Job said that he "had made a covenant with his eyes not to think of a virgin." One would suppose that he ought to have said, that he had made a covenant with his mind, since thinking belongs to the mind, and not to the eyes. But he thus expresses himself, to show the intimate connection which exists between looking at an object and thinking of it. "Job knew," says St. Gregory, "that the eyes are the inlets to all the malice of the heart, and that, if he kept a strict guard on them, and the avenues of his senses, his interior would be secure and out of danger. If you, therefore, wish to prevent evil thoughts, take care to follow the example of holy Job, and keep a guard over your eyes." "Who would not be astonished," says St. Chrysostom,

(a) Eccles. ix. 8, 9.

writing on the same passage, that so great a man as Job, who had made head against the devil, fought hand to hand with him, and triumphed as well over all his stratagems as his power, should not dare to look a woman in the face? He did this, adds the same holy father, to teach the greatest proficients in virtue to keep a restraint and guard over themselves. Another saint compares the sight of a woman to a poisoned arrow, whose wound reaches the heart; and also to a spark of fire, which, lighting upon straw, unless immediately put out, sets it all on fire. In like manner, evil thoughts, caused by the sight of a woman, bring along with them nothing but fire and confusion into the soul, unless timely stifled and prevented. St. Ignatius of Loyola was most particular on this point. As exterior modesty is the fence which protects the fair flower of chastity, the saint took care to lay down special rules on the subject, which was never before done by any founder of a religious order. He had these rules greatly at heart, and complaining of a minister who had neglected to have them immediately published and put in practice, he said, "I wrote the rules with great thought and study, but the ministers do not exert any corresponding care, as if they had cost me nothing. Now, I tell you that these rules have caused me much labour, and that I have prayed much about them, more than seven times, and shed many tears." Hence it happened that whenever any of the society were seen, they were recognised by the modesty of their gait. Some evil-minded persons took this for hypocrisy, and reported it to Ignatius. who answered, "God grant that such hypocrisy may ever increase amongst us."

The venerable John Berckmans, a faithful son of Ignatius, followed the rules of modesty laid down by the holy founder with the greatest perfection. He kept his eyes constantly cast down, unless necessity required otherwise; and when any stranger accosted him, he would merely take a hasty glance, to satisfy himself as to the person he was speaking to, and then resume his usual modest look. If addressed by any one whose voice was familiar to him, he did not raise his eyes, answering with charity and sweetness whatever was desired of him. This reserve became so habitual to him that it caused him no trouble or inconvenience; he maintained it even in sudden occasions of surprise. Some young secular students of philosophy often made a sudden noise, on purpose to put his constant watchfulness to the proof, but they never could succeed in disturbing it: in fine, his sight was so completely under his control, that it was never diverted but as he pleased; and so little liberty did he allow it, that several persons, who had lived years with him, scarcely knew the colour of his eyes.

As regards the mortification of our tongue, we must take care, lest we defile it by any expression offensive to modesty. "Fornication, and all uncleanness," says St. Paul, "let it not so much as be named amongst us, as becometh saints; or obscenity, or foolish talking, or scurrility, which is to no purpose." (a) "Be very careful," says St. Francis of Sales, "that no dishonest word ever escape your lips, for, although it may not proceed from an evil intention, still it may be taken in a bad sense by those who hear it. A

(a) Ephes. v. 3, 4.

dishonest word, falling on a weak soul, spreads like a drop of oil upon linen, and sometimes so completely diffuses itself through the heart as to thoroughly imbue it with unchaste impressions and temptations. As poison enters the body through the mouth, so the poison of the heart enters through the ear, and the tongue which distils it is a murderer; for although the poison may be counteracted by the good dispositions it meets with in the hearts of those who receive it, still it is always true to say, that it was not the fault of the tongue, that it did not effect the death of their souls. Let no one say, that he had no bad intention, for our Lord, who knows all our thoughts, has told us, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;' and although we may think *no* evil, the wicked enemy thinks *much*, and is ever ready artfully to make use of the least dishonest word to sully the minds and hearts of those around us.

"It is said that those who eat of the herb Angelica have always sweet and agreeable breath; and those who really entertain the love of chastity in their hearts, by which they become angels on earth, utter none but chaste, honest, and respectful words. As to what is really dishonest and indecent, the apostle would not have it so much as named amongst us, assuring us that 'evil communications corrupt good manners.' When dishonest words are spoken under disguise, and subtly turned, their poison is the more penetrating; they are like darts, which are the more to be dreaded and pierce the deeper because they are of finer temper and their points more sharpened. In truth, those who would acquire a reputation for gallantry, by making use of such words,

are utterly ignorant of the aim of conversation; and may we not compare the companies in which such words are tolerated to a swarm of flies gorging on some putrid matter; while we may compare an assembly that is honest in all its discourses to a swarm of bees, collected together for the purpose of making the sweetest honey? If, then, some wanton person should address you in an indecent manner, testify at once your displeasure, either by turning away to speak to some one else, or in such other way that your discretion may dictate."

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

"Lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, and angel of Satan to buffet me. For which thing, thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me; and He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity.' Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." [a]—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Humility is the safer guard of chastity. In the matter of purity, there is no greater danger than the not fearing danger. For my part, when I find a man secure of himself and without fear, I give him up for lost. I am less alarmed for one who is tempted, and who resists by avoiding the occasions, than for one who is not tempted, and is not careful to avoid occasions. When a person puts himself in an occasion, saying, *I shall not fall*, it is an almost infallible sign that he *will fall*, and with great injury to his soul."—*St. Philip.*

Of all the means which are suggested by the saints as most useful for the preservation of holy

[a] 2 Cor. xii. 7—9

chastity, humility is recommended by them as one of the first. "How comes it to pass," says St. Bernard, "that some Christians, who lived very chaste in their youthful days, in the midst of all those violent temptations to which that age is usually subject, have fallen afterwards into the greatest vices of the flesh, and so desperately too, that they have even been astonished at themselves? The reason is this, they spent their youth in humility and in the fear of God, and seeing themselves every moment in danger of falling, they continually had recourse to God, Who never failed to succour them. But having lived long chaste, they grew proud; and when they presumed too much upon themselves, God withdrew His hand which sustained them, so that, being left to themselves, they followed the motion of their own weakness, which led them to fall." To the same cause St. Ambrose attributes the fall of several great men, who, after having served God a long while, making His law their daily and nightly meditation, crucifying their flesh, restraining the heat of concupiscence, and suffering great afflictions and outrages with a generous patience, fell at last from the summit of virtue into an abyss of misery and disorder. "They began at last," says he, "to set too great a value upon their good works, and to presume too much upon their own strength; so that the devil, who was not able heretofore to seduce them by all the imaginary baits and allurements of sensuality, nor overcome them by the violence of persecution, has now undermined them by their own pride and presumption, and hereby wrought their ruin."

Holy Scripture, and the works of the holy fathers, furnish us with infinite examples of this

kind. "I tremble," says St. Austin, "when I think of so many great men, whom we have seen and heard of, who, after their virtues had placed them among the stars, and almost fixed their habitation in heaven, have miserably fallen into most grievous sins, and died impenitent. We have seen, Lord, the great lights of Thy church fall from heaven, being pulled from thence by the infernal dragon; and, on the contrary, some that lay, as it were, grovelling upon the ground, have been wonderfully elevated all at once, by the power of thy Almighty hand." How often have we seen those who for a great while ate of the bread of angels at the altar, fall afterwards to feed upon husks with swine? How many have we known that for many years lived chaste and pure, afterwards plunged themselves into all the filthiness and beastliness of lust and uncleanness? "Consider," says St. Jerome, "that persons far more eminent for virtue than you are, and once great favourites of heaven, have fallen. You are not more holy than David, wiser than Solomon, nor stronger than Sampson, and yet all these have fallen." Nicholas, one of the seven deacons, upon whom the Holy Ghost descended, as well as upon the other six, became not only a heretic, but the author of an impure sect, and a father of heretics. Who is there who can think himself secure from the malice of the old serpent, when he remembers such examples? This made St. Jerome, in one of his epistles to the holy virgin Eustochius, admonish her not to neglect herself by relying too much upon the holiness of her state of life. "Your good resolutions," says he, "must not make you proud, but humble and diffident; you carry a great sum of gold about

you, take care not to meet any highwaymen. This life is a race for all mankind; we run here to obtain a crown hereafter in the other world; and how can you hope for peace and quiet in a world which produces nothing but crosses and affliction?" There is nothing certain: in this life we are in a continual warfare, and, therefore, ought to be upon our guard day and night. We sail in a tempestuous sea that threatens us on every side, and in a poor leaky vessel: the devil, who aims at nothing less than our destruction, never ceases to increase the storm, to overwhelm us thereby, if he can; hence it was that the apostle gave this precaution, even to the virtuous: "Let him that thinketh he stands firm, take care lest he fall." (a)

Whoever, therefore, sincerely desires to preserve holy chastity, must take care to walk faithfully in the path of humility. The revelation which St. Anthony had is well known. He one day saw, in spirit, the whole earth covered with snares, and all of them so dexterously laid, that, being affrighted at the vision, he cried out, "Lord, who can escape all these?" and presently it was answered him, "The humble of heart." Be you, therefore, humble, and God will deliver you from these tempting snares of the flesh. "God has a particular care of little ones," says David; "I myself was humbled, and he delivered me." The highest mountains suffer most from storms; a tempestuous wind sometimes roots up the strongest oak, whilst the little shrub and the osier, by yielding and bending to the wind, resume their former place as soon as the violent blast is over.

(a) 1 Cor. x. 12.

St. Jerome relates that a religious, in a monastery in Egypt, was much troubled with temptations of the flesh; and having endeavoured, in vain, by fastings and other austerities, to overcome them, discovered the state of his soul to his superior, who, having comforted him, took this expedient to cure him. He desired an ancient, grave, and severe monk, to make it his business frequently to contradict this young monk, and to chide and reprehend him very severely, and after this to come and complain, as if the other had offended him. This senior took every opportunity of quarrelling with the young man, and acquitted himself of his charge very well. Besides this, he would carry to the superior not only his own complaints, but also those of other religious; and the superior, having severely reprehended him, always imposed some heavy penance on him, as if he had been really in fault. This happening every day, and the young religious extremely troubled to see himself thus roughly dealt with, and so many false testimonies raised against him, had recourse continually to Almighty God, laying all his miseries before Him, begging with tears that He would take him into his protection, since all the world had forsaken him. Notwithstanding this, all the religious still continued so to torment him, that there was no mischief done in the house which was not immediately laid to his charge, and that by two or three witnesses, so that he had every day new reprehensions and penances given him. This having lasted about a year, one of the religious asked him how he found himself as to those temptations of the flesh, which formerly used to be so irksome to him? "What!" says he; "it is scarcely permitted me to live, and can you

think that my thoughts can be employed upon sinful pleasures? It is a great while since all those ideas have been effaced from my mind." It was thus the superior cured him, finding means to banish the old ideas by introducing new ones, which were more troublesome, but less dangerous.

We read of the venerable Benedict Labré, that, notwithstanding his spirit of prayer and constant mortification, he suffered, especially at night, the most violent temptations against holy purity. No sooner had the servant of God obtained a little sleep, which he could only do with great difficulty, stretched on the bare ground, than the devil attacked him with wicked illusions, images, phantoms, and rebellions of the flesh. Great was the distress of the servant of God, who, on one side, abhorred supremely every shadow of offence against God, and at the same time saw himself, as it were, on the brink of the precipice. Strengthened, however, by the divine assistance, and confiding in God, he used every effort to repress the impetuosity of the temptations, resisting courageously with a resolute will, and declaring himself ready to suffer death rather than offend his beloved Lord. When this did not suffice to overcome the enemy, he extended himself on the ground, humbling himself, and imploring help from Almighty God; he invoked the most pure and immaculate Virgin; he often made the sign of the cross; he struck his breast, and, often thinking on the passion of our Blessed Redeemer, he blushed for his shameful thoughts, so opposed to it. Thus, at last, he succeeded in gaining tranquillity and a complete victory.

We also read of the blessed Leonard, that, although he laboured most diligently to preserve

the lily of purity, yet he had no self-reliance; and, in exhorting his companions and others to be vigilant in the custody of this precious virtue, he thus expressed himself: "My brothers, old as I am, I have so much fear on this point that I would not risk even raising my eyes from the ground, knowing that many men, adorned with every virtue and holiness, by a sudden temptation, have fallen miserably." At other times he would say, "Let us fly from danger, fear all things, and recommend ourselves to God, for there is nothing of which we ought to be so jealous as chastity. The devil never sleeps, he stands in wait for the old as well as the young; if a religious unfortunately falls, it is from a great height into a deep precipice." To make himself more secure, he proposed to reveal to his spiritual father minutely all the dangers to which he was exposed against this virtue, and exhorted others to the same, saying, "Ah! if you knew how the devil is daunted when he sees himself discovered, and when we make known to our confessor his suggestions with sincerity, and allow ourselves to be ruled by his wise counsels! Thus, beholding his designs discovered, he flies in confusion; but if he sees us deceiving ourselves, and we allow his temptations to lie concealed in our hearts, flattering ourselves that, not having sinned, we may be silent, he increases his boldness, and be sure he will use every effort to tempt and to conquer.

JUNE.

OBEDIENCE.

"Obedience is better than sacrifice."—1 KINGS xv. 22.

FIRST DAY.

"Let every soul be subject to higher powers; for there is no power but from God, and the powers which are, are ordained by God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist purchase to themselves damnation." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"As in the inanimate and irrational nature, according to divine appointment, the lower things are subordinate to the higher, so amongst men the divine law requires that inferiors be subject to and obey their superiors."—*St. Thomas Aquinas.*

ST. JEROME, exhorting all religious to be obedient to their superiors, quotes several facts which prove the absolute necessity of obedience to some one supreme head, in every condition or state of life. "In civil government," says he, "all are subject to kings, emperors, and other temporal potentates. In ecclesiastical government, all Christian people obey the bishops of their respective dioceses; and the bishops themselves are subject to his Holiness, who is the head of the Church, and Christ's vicar upon earth. The greatest army submits to the authority of one general. One captain commands a regiment of

(a) Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

soldiers; on ship-board there would be nothing but disorder and confusion if every man were master; and God only knows what would become of the ship, if every private seaman had full power to steer her as he pleased. Again, every family, every private dwelling and poor cottage has one whom the other members or inmates obey. There is neither house, assembly, city, nor kingdom, that can long subsist without subordination to authority: 'Every kingdom and house that is divided shall become desolate.'" Nor does this order exist only amongst men; even amongst angels, "one hierarchy is subordinate to another." St. John Crysostom teaches the same thing: "It is bad," says he, "to be without a ruler, and the cause of many miseries, the beginning of disorder and confusion. For it is as if you were to deprive a choir of its leader, which would destroy harmony; or a regiment of its captain, which would prevent an orderly advance; a ship without helmsman must sink, and a flock without shepherd be scattered. No less is the evil of disobedience in subjects."[a]

Obedience, then, is necessary for all, and not only for those who have actually renounced the world and taken it upon themselves by vow; it is a virtue which must be practised by those also who, remaining in the world, are desirous to serve God and save their souls. Children must obey their parents, wives their husbands, servants their masters, subjects their sovereigns, the faithful their pastors: "Be ye subject," says St. Peter, "to every human creature, for God's sake, whether it be to the king as excelling, or governors

[a] Hom. xxxiv. on the Ep. to the Heb.

as sent by him, for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of the good."(a) "Children," writes the apostle St. Paul, "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just. Servants, be obedient to them that are your lords, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as to Christ. Not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will, serving as to the Lord and not to men. Knowing, that whatever good thing any man shall do, the same shall he receive from the Lord."(b) "Obey your prelates," writes the same apostle, in his letter to the Hebrews, "and be subject to them; for they watch as being to render an account of your souls."(c)

The saints, in their various stations and employments, have carried their obedience to superiors to the most exact perfection. St. Jerome says, that St. Eustochius used to obey her mother Paula with such exactness, that whether she went to rest by night, or rose in the morning, or took her meals, or distributed alms to the poor, or performed any other employment in the house, she did all in obedience to her mother's will.

Of the venerable Margaret Alacoque we are told, that from her earliest years, she practised holy obedience with great perfection towards all those who had any authority over her. Speaking of herself, she says: "My Divine Master impressed in my soul so great a fear of doing my own will, or of following it in anything, that I thought whatever I did would only be agreeable to Him

(a) 1 Peter ii. 13, 14. (b) Ephes. vi. 1, 5—8.
(c) Heb. xiii. 17.

when done through obedience. This gave me a great desire to do all my actions through obedience and love." From this principle she submitted to every one, and obeyed even those whom she was entitled to command. "I could not do anything," said she, "without permission, and that not only from my mother, but also from those with whom I lived, and to whom I subjected myself. It is true this obedience was often a severe trial to me" (without doubt, because of the contradictions that her charity met with, and the ridicule her humility drew upon her,) "yet I deemed it my duty to submit to all those to obey whom I felt the greatest repugnance." It is easy to imagine how much humiliation and suffering such a universal and implicit obedience must have cost her; for the people with whom she lived took advantage of it, to treat her with great rudeness, and delighted in opposing her, even in the most just and reasonable things. Others would have made this a reason for throwing off a yoke so grievous; but the faithful disciple of Jesus, obedient even unto death, thought only of pleasing Him and of conquering herself, and by these two motives she made even contradiction sweet.

St. Rose of Lima, again, was most exact in obeying her mother in all lawful things, and never received a command which she did not cheerfully fulfil. Her mother, wishing one day to try her obedience, gave her some wrong directions in embroidering some flowers. Rose obeyed blindly, and spoiled her work; and her mother, feigning to be angry, reproved her for it. Upon which, this truly obedient daughter answered, that she had perceived that her work was good for nothing, but had not dared to disobey the

order given her; that it was of no consequence to her in what manner she traced a flower, but that she would not fail in obedience to her mother's orders. For this reason, she never began her work without asking permission from her mother; and one of her friends, being astonished at the practice, she told her, that she did it expressly to join to her work the merit of obedience.

Reverence to the Divine will made St. Vincent of Paul obey promptly all those who had any public authority, whether the Pope, or bishops, parish priests, or temporal rulers, showing all and each of them a singular respect. From the same motive he would never undertake the most trifling matter without the advice and approbation of his director.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi had an unbounded affection for obedience, as the great means to avoid the danger of following her own will. Hence, in the midst of the most trying temptations and interior conflicts, she immediately regained her wonted cheerfulness and serenity, when the will of her superiors was made known to her.

SECOND DAY.

"He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." [a]—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"The obedience which we render to a superior is paid to God, who says, 'He that hears you hears Me;' so that whatever he, who holds the place of God, commands, supposing it not evidently contrary to God's law, is to be received by us as if it came from God Himself; for it is the same thing to know His will either from His own, from an angel's, or from a man's mouth."—*St. Bernard.*

Jesus Christ was sent by His divine Father to establish His kingdom upon earth, and to be the ruler of His people: "Behold," says the Lord, through the prophet Isaias, "I have given Him for a leader and a master to the nations." [b] And when our Redeemer was baptized by St. John, as He came up out of the water, a voice was heard, saying: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him." Christ, then, is the great organ of the will of God—the great teacher to whom all must listen—the great leader whom all must obey; all power, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him by the Father, who has set Him over all the works of His hands, and made all things subject to Him. Now it is certain that Christ has given the same power and authority to His spouse the Church: "As the living Father hath sent Me," says He, "so also do I send you .... he who hears you hears Me .... whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven." Hence,

[a] Luke x. 16. [b] Isaias lv. 4.

when the Church enjoins anything to her members, she speaks in the name of Christ, with the authority of God. This authority which the Church has received from her divine spouse, she exercises by the instrumentality of her ministers, namely, by means of the pope, the bishops, and other pastors subordinate to them; and in religious communities, by the instrumentality of their respective superiors; for, when a religious body is approved by the Church, she delegates to the superiors of that body her authority, and commissions them to rule its members in her name. Hence it is evident, that whether religious or seculars, by obeying our superiors we obey the Church, and by obeying the Church we obey Christ himself, and so fulfil the will of His heavenly Father.

We must not then expect that God will send an angel from heaven to teach us His will, for He has already spoken to us by his Son: "The only begotten Son," says St. John, "who is in the bosom of his Father, has told us what we have to do."(a) And the divine Son continually speaks to us individually through the instrumentality of our superiors.

St. Austin says, that God intimated this in the order He observed in the conversion of Cornelius the centurion. This man was a heathen as to his religion, but otherwise, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, a very good man, a great almsgiver, and one that prayed very much. In order, then, to convert him and instruct him in the Catholic faith, God sent an angel to him, but merely with this message: "Cornelius, thy prayers and alms-

(a) John i. 18.

deeds have ascended to the presence of God, and he is mindful of them; therefore, despatch a servant to Joppa, for one Simon, surnamed Peter; he lives in the house of one Simon a tanner, near the sea; he will instruct thee, and tell thee what thou art to do." "Whence comes it," asks St. Austin, "that God did not appoint this same angel to instruct him?" Undoubtedly the angel was able to do it; but God would have him seek instruction from Peter. He would not undertake to instruct him Himself, nor commission an angel to do it, but commits him to man's care; thereby to honour man, for whose sake He himself became man; and paid obedience to man, as the Gospel states in these words: "And He was subject to them." St. Bernard makes a similar remark upon St. Paul's conversion. Though Jesus Christ appeared to him, yet He would not declare His will Himself, but remitted him to another, saying: "Go into the city, and there thou shalt be told what thou must do." How admirable is thy wisdom, O God, says St. Bernard, upon these words, that so sweetly disposes all things to their end. Thou art pleased to send thy servant Saul, to whom thou didst speak Thyself, to a man for further instructions, thereby to show the advantages of living under obedience. Thou sendest him to man to honour man the more, and to show his authority; to make us respect him as thy vicegerent, and to oblige us to receive the orders of our superiors, as coming from Thyself. St. Bonaventure says, it is commendable obedience to obey God, when He himself commands us; but it is a far greater act to obey man for God's sake; because, when we obey man for God's sake, we humble and debase ourselves

more, and show a greater denial of our own will, and a resignation to that of God. Should God in person command us anything, our most steady compliance would not be wonderful; but when, for God's sake, we comply as readily with the commands of a man like ourselves, and submit our wills and judgments to him, with the same deference as to God, it is certainly an act of greater merit, and more prized by Him. St. Teresa was so persuaded of this truth, that she used to say, if all the angels in heaven were to command her one thing, and her superior another, she would prefer the order of her superior; "for," she added, "obedience to superiors is commanded by God in the sacred Scriptures, and, consequently, is a matter of faith, in which there can be no mistake, whereas private revelations are subject to illusions." And, in fact, she several times discovered to her director things that had been revealed to her by God; and, because he disapproved of them, he immediately dismissed the thought of them.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi never distinguished the person of the superior who commanded her, but always recognised in her, God and Jesus Christ, and regarded the command as divine, and imposed on her by the authority of God; so that in the kitchen she would as willingly obey the cook, whilst she was her superior, as the prioress, because she saw Christ in her, and for the love of Him she obeyed those who had received any authority over her.

THIRD DAY.

"As by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made just." (a)

"Although He was the son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and, being consummated, He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation." (b)

"He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross; for which cause God also hath exalted Him, and has given Him a name which is above all names." (c)
—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Obedience is a virtue of so excellent a nature, that our Lord was pleased to mark its observance upon the whole course of His life; thus He often says, He did not come to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Augustine, after speaking in great commendation of the virtue of obedience, says, that one of the reasons which moved the Son of God to take human nature upon Himself, was to teach us obedience by His own example. Man, says he, was disobedient even to death, that is, death was the deserved punishment of his disobedience; and the Son of God made Himself man, that He might be obedient unto death, for the redemption of man. Adam's disobedience shut heaven's gates against us, Christ's obedience threw them open; for, as by the disobedience of one man many sinned, so by the obedience of one many were justified.

Learn, O man, to be humble, writes St. Bernard; learn to be obedient. The Evangelist, speaking of the Incarnate Wisdom, says, that he was subject to Mary and Joseph. The Son of

(a) Rom. v. 19. (b) Heb. v. 8, 9.
(c) Philip ii. 8, 9.

God humbly submits to the yoke of obedience, and shalt thou refuse to obey?

St. Teresa used to say: "One of the greatest graces for which I feel myself indebted to our Lord is, that His divine Majesty has given me the desire to be obedient; for, in this virtue I find most consolation and contentment, it being that which our Lord recommended by His own example more than any other, and on this account I desire to possess it more than anything else in the world.

The blessed Paul of the Cross, when very young, was praying devoutly one day, during Holy Week, in the church, when he heard those words sung: "Christ became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." At which his heart was so struck, that he kept saying to himself: "Jesus was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and ought not I to be thus obedient?" He then made a vow of obedience, and fulfilled it by obeying, not only his parents, sisters, and brothers, but also the servants who waited upon him. In after-life, when he had founded the Congregation of the Holy Passion, the good father, although the superior, attended in this spirit of obedience, with great exactness, to the choir, and all the minute duties of the regular observance, to the great edification of the community. It was also his constant practice to obey his spiritual guide in everything that related to his own person, giving up his own will, and following his direction as a child. He was also most anxious to see this holy virtue flourish amongst the members of his congregation: "Ah, my dear brethren," says he, in a letter he addressed to them, "above all things, let true and perfect

charity unite your hearts, so that you may have only one heart and one soul in God. Give yourselves so completely into the hands of your superiors, that they may do with you what they please, when it is not opposed to the divine law. You know that Jesus Christ was obedient unto death, and the death of the cross; therefore, you ought to die to yourselves, burying your own opinion and judgment. Renounce, my dearly beloved, your own understanding, knowledge, and will, giving yourselves like dead men to your superiors. So long as you do not give yourselves like corpses, into the hands of obedience, you will never taste what it is to serve God. Pant as eagerly after the destruction of your own will, as the hart after the fountain. Let it seem to you that you have lost that day in which you have not resisted your own will, and submitted it to another. Often offer your wills in sacrifice to God, and you will feel the greatest satisfaction; the more obedient you are, the more tranquil you will be under every circumstance, and you will be alike disposed to one office as another, for you will be truly espoused to holy obedience, and will love it in Jesus Christ, who is the sovereign King of the obedient. And you will thus render yourselves more capable of assisting holy Church and our poor congregation by prayer, for Jesus hears the prayers of the obedient."

Expressing the same sentiment to a devout person, he thus writes: "Our sweet Jesus allowed Himself to be both clothed and stripped by the ministers of death at their pleasure; they bound and unbound Him; they pushed Him to this side and that; and the most meek and divine Lamb submitted to all. Oh! sweet meekness of Jesus,

our sovereign Lord! Continue to perfect yourself in every way like a meek little lamb; rejoice when your designs, though good, are frustrated; the time will come when God will enable you to bring them to true perfection."

FOURTH DAY.

"Obedience is a short cut to perfection. They who are living under obedience, if they really wish to advance in the ways of God, must give themselves up always and in all things into the hands of their superiors; and they who are not living under obedience must subject themselves to some learned and discreet confessor, whom they may obey in the place of God, disclosing to him, with perfect candour and simplicity, the affairs of their soul; and they should never come to any resolution without his advice. Nothing gives greater security to our actions, or more effectually cuts the snares the devil lays for us, than to follow another person's will, rather than our own, in doing good."—*St. Philip.*

"The fulfilment of the divine will is the creature's supreme good; and this is best secured by the practice of holy obedience, for in it the soul attains a total annihilation of self-love, and the true liberty of the child of God. This is the reason devout souls find so much happiness and sweetness in obedience."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

THE holy fathers are unanimous in bestowing the highest praise on the virtue of obedience, extolling particularly its excellence and merit for perfection. St. Augustine several times in his works asks, why God forbade Adam to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and one of the reasons he gives is, that it was to teach man the intrinsic excellence of obedience, and how

great the evil of disobedience. It was not the fruit of the tree that wrought all those evils that followed from Adam's sin, because the tree itself had nothing that was bad in it, since God himself saw all His works to be excellent and good; nor is it to be presumed that He would permit any evil thing to grow in the earthly paradise. Disobedience, therefore—a breach of God's law—was the cause of all the evil. And for this reason St. Austin says, that nothing shows the malice of disobedience more than the punishment inflicted upon Adam for eating the forbidden fruit. The same holy doctor, giving a reason for the prohibition to Adam, says, that since man was created to serve God, it was necessary to restrain him in some particular, that he might be sensible of his dependence upon a superior power; and God tried him by obedience, not only that he might acknowledge his Creator, but also merit, had he persevered, an eternal and consummate union with Him.

Whoever, therefore, wishes to fulfil with perfection the divine will, and to make great progress in virtue, must apply himself with diligence to the practice of holy obedience. That is the way; you need only follow it, without turning either to the right or left, and you will soon come to the place you wish for. (a) St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that an obedient religious is a precious gem. St. Luigi Gonzaga, that religion is a ship, in which even those who actually rest from labour, make the voyages. Yes; for a religious who is truly obedient, merits, not only when he fasts, or meditates, or recites the office,

(a) Isaias xxx. 21.

but also when he takes repose, or abstains from labour; when he eats, or goes to recreation. In the lives of the holy fathers of the desert, we read, that four devout monks came one day to the glorious abbot Pambo, and severally recounted to him the virtues for which the others were most eminent, desiring to know which was the most excellent way. One fasted much; another perfected himself in actual poverty; the third was distinguished for his fervent devotion; and the fourth had lived for two-and-twenty years under obedience. When the holy abbot had heard what they told him, he said: "This last is the first in virtue; for you follow your own wills, whereas he follows that of another."

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi preferred the most trivial and mean actions performed in obedience, to those of a greater perfection of her own choice; and, for the same reason, she esteemed more highly life in community, than eremitical or solitary life, saying, that though there is great perfection in the solitary and anchoretical state, nevertheless, a life in community presents an opportunity for a mystical death, by the subjugation of self, through the mortification of the will. She was also most anxious that her subjects should highly value the virtue of obedience; and exhorted them to the practice of it with great fervour, showing them its greatness, and how pleasing it is to God, and teaching them, by word and example, how to acquire it. She said to one of them: "If you wish in a short time to acquire much hidden virtue, never omit this good and salutary exercise of obedience, for I hold it to be most efficacious in giving death to self, and life to the soul." Another time, she said, that obe-

dience seeks to have no will of its own in anything, however holy, but aims only at reverencing superiors, becoming blind, and obeying simply; that unwillingness to obey, when superiors forbid us to practise austerities and spontaneous penance, is self-love. In short, she said, that the virtue which exalted Christ was obedience, for He obeyed even to the death of the cross.

St. John Climachus came one day to a monastery, in which he saw many venerable religious men, who were always ready, upon the least sign given them, to do whatsoever was commanded them; and he says, that some of them had been enlisted under the standard of obedience for above fifty years. He asked, what benefit they had derived from this their submission; and was told, that some were hereby come to a profound humility, and by that means had defeated the devil in several dangerous attacks he had made against them; and others had overcome all resentment, when any injury or affront was offered them.

St. Dorotheus tells us, that his disciple Dositheus was of very delicate constitution, and that whilst he was in the world, he was struck with a lively apprehension of the final judgment, and of the rigorous account he was one day to give, God granting him what the royal prophet requested in these words: "Pierce my flesh with a fear of Thee, for I tremble at thy judgments." To be able to answer for himself on that great day, he became a religious; but finding that his health would not let him rise at midnight to matins, nor eat the ordinary diet, nor comply with all the observances of the community, he resolved to devote himself entirely to obedience; he undertook

to serve in the infirmary in the lowest offices, and to do whatever was commanded him there, though ever so humiliating. Having done this for five years, he died of consumption, and God revealed to the abbot of the monastery, that Dositheus had merited as much as St. Paul and Anthony the hermits had done. When the other religious heard this, they began to murmur and complain, saying, Where was God's justice, if a man that never fasted, and that always eat of the best, be equal to us, who perform all duties of religion, and bear the heat and burden of the day? What are we the better for all our austerities? Our continual labour and pain signify nothing. Whilst they were thus complaining, God gave them to understand, that they did not know the worth and excellence of obedience, and that it was of so high value in his sight, that Dositheus had merited more in a short time, than several of them had done by their long and rigid mortifications.

FIFTH DAY.

"Obedience is the compendium of the spiritual life; and the least laborious, least dangerous, the most secure, and most expeditious way to enrich ourselves with all virtues, and to reach the end of all our desires, life eternal."—*Venerable Father Alvarez.*

"By the other virtues, we offer to God what we possess, but by obedience, we offer ourselves to Him."—*St. Gregory.*

St. Thomas, after stating that obedience is the chief and principal vow made in religion, proves his assertion by the following reasons, namely:

first, because by the vow of obedience we offer to God what is most valuable and most pleasing in His sight. By the vow of poverty, a person offers to God his earthly possessions, his external goods, but not himself. By the vow of chastity, he dedicates to God his body, his flesh, his animal part, but not himself. But by the vow of obedience, he offers himself, wholly and entirely, to God, because he offers to Him his rational will, which alone truly and properly constitutes the nature of man. St. Jerome, speaking of the difference between sacrificing ourselves and sacrificing our riches, says, that a consummate virtue is not necessary to sacrifice our riches, since those who are only novices in perfection are capable of it. Antisthenes, and other heathen philosophers, have done it before us; but to sacrifice ourselves to God belongs peculiarly to Christians and apostolical men. Hence St. Thomas remarks on this subject, that Christ, speaking to His disciples concerning the reward he had prepared for them, did not say, ye that have left all, but ye who have followed me, for all perfection lies in following Christ. "Verily, I say unto you, that you who have followed Me shall sit upon twelve thrones." Now, the counsel of obedience is included in these words; for, as the holy doctor adds, obedience is nothing else than following the direction and will of another.

The second reason why obedience is the most excellent of the religious virtues is, because it implicitly contains poverty and chastity, and is not itself included in either of them. A person who follows strict obedience must be ready to abandon all things, to practise mortifications, and to fulfil all which is enjoined him with regard to

the other virtues. By poverty he may relinquish all things, and by chastity he may practise the greatest austerities, yet in all these acts he may really please himself and follow his own will, but under obedience he will observe those virtues in perfection. Hence, in some religious orders, the vow of obedience only is enjoined, because, in reality, it includes the others. This was the case formerly in the order of St. Benedict, and is still amongst the Cistercians, the subjects merely taking a vow of obedience, according to the rules.

The third reason is, that obedience, more than the other two virtues, helps religious to attain to the end of their holy vocation.

This important truth was well known to the saints. The blessed Valfré always had a most lively desire to go to Rome, to visit its holy places, and more particularly to breathe forth his prayers and satisfy his devotion over the mortal remains of his holy father, St. Philip, which are jealously preserved in the church dedicated to him. An opportunity for making his journey came, and he sought the permission of the superior, who not only at once freely condescended to his pious wishes, but, moreover, encouraged him to set out directly, and gave him various commissions for the holy city. Everything being arranged, he took leave of the fathers and of his friends, and, accompanied by F. Genesio Carriatore, and by many persons, through esteem, he set out for the river Po, there to embark. Just as he was about to leave the port, Carriatore gave him a note, which he had a secret commission from the superior to deliver at that very moment. The note ran thus: "As soon as you have read these few lines, you will immediately return to

the congregation, thinking no more of the journey to Rome." Having read the note, he directly took up his packages, and got out of the vessel, merely saying, "Let us return home; the journey to Rome is delightful, and is at an end."

The blessed Leonard used to say, that, by obedience, we practise, in an especial manner, the three theological virtues. We practise the virtue of faith, by regarding, in the person of the superior, God, from whom he has authority to command, or forbid, whatever he deems proper for the good regulation of those under him. We practise hope, placing all things in the hands of those who rule over us, in confidence that we are directed by an especial Providence. We give up our own will, and are ruled by that of others, secure of being guided in the way most to our advantage. And, finally, we practise the virtue of charity, by loving the Divine Will, and embracing what God, by means of our superiors, disposes, willingly doing their pleasure. He held obedience in such high esteem that when anything arduous or difficult was imposed upon him, or to encourage others, he would say, "If we have made the vow of obedience, let us give even our lives for it; I shall consider myself most fortunate if I die for obedience." He was often requested by persons of distinction, and even by cardinals, to transact some important business, but he always pointed to his superior, if he was present, and replied, with humility, "Please your eminence, this person stands to me in the place of God upon earth. I cannot say anything for myself. Since I made my religious profession, I have had no will but that of my superior, who governs me in the place of God." His esteem

for his superiors was such that, besides speaking to them with reverence, he always listened with attention to whatever was said, with his eyes cast down. He showed the sincerity of these sentiments by placing himself in their hands, as a child, ready to obey whatever they commanded.

SIXTH DAY.

"'Why have we fasted, and Thou hast not regarded? We have humbled our souls, and Thou hast taken no notice.' 'Behold, in the day of your fast, your own will is found.'" (a)—*The Prophet Isaias.*

"Obedience is a penance of reason; and, on that account, a sacrifice more acceptable than all corporal penances and mortifications. God is more pleased to behold the lowest degree of obedience, for His sake, than all other good works which you can possibly offer to Him."—*St. John of the Cross.*

St. Felix the Capucin, in all his actions, looked to the direction of holy obedience, and followed it as the safest guide; hence, if his superiors simply forbade him any act of austerity, he abandoned it forthwith, not only without repugnance, but even with the most perfect peace of mind. As an instance of this, at the suggestion of the cardinal protector of his order, he resumed the use of sandals, though he had been accustomed to go barefoot for a considerable time, without a single expression that indicated an undue attachment to his former practice, or a fear lest people in the world should think that his abandonment

(a) Isaias lviii. 3.

of it had arisen from a weariness in the service of God.

The blessed Valfré thus wrote to a nun who had used the discipline in opposition to her director's judgment: "You have committed a great error in disciplining yourself, even to blood, against the judgment of your confessor. The devil suffers more than you, and does not draw any benefit from his torments, they being the effect of his disobedience. From this time, proceed differently. As long as you do your own will, suffer what you please, you will never gain any merit with God. One *Pater-Noster* devoutly recited through obedience, is worth a hundred disciplines to blood made through caprice. Discipline your passions; be more humble and gentle; this is the sure road that leads to Paradise."

Of St. Ignatius, it is said, that he used sometimes to interrupt his subjects in some course of extraordinary penance, to teach them that obedience was a still higher thing, and to preserve them from the danger of pride. Thus, when a brother asked leave to fast during Lent on bread and water, the saint permitted him, for he always complied with the inclinations of all, when they were not wrong, but, when Good Friday came, he commanded him to eat the food provided at the common table, thus adding to the merit of the fast that of obedience, and a victory over self-will.

St. Catharine of Bologna used to do the same. She never spoke of obedience except in the tenderest manner; she preferred it to the other virtues, and did not hesitate to say that it is more meritorious than the most austere life, and that no macerations, however terrible, can equal it. I

exhort you, my dear daughters, she used often to say to her novices, not to neglect any means of acquiring this great virtue; I conjure you not to refuse to God the sacrifice that He expects and demands from you. Catharine, like a faithful follower of Jesus, Who, before teaching, gave, in His own person, an example of His lessons, applied herself like a novice to everything prescribed by holy obedience, and never did the least thing without asking the permission of the abbess.

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque, after her entrance into religion, submitted to her superiors as to Jesus Christ, and received their words as oracles from God; hence, though her eagerness to mortify herself and to suffer was great, her desire to obey and to practise implicit submission was still greater.

However, on one occasion, by a subterfuge, suggested by the desire of suffering, she resolved to prolong some austerity that had been permitted her, farther than exact obedience allowed. Although her motive was good, this excess did not please God, who loves the simplicity of obedience better than the most severe austerities; and the holy father, St. Francis, for whom she had conceived a great devotion, appeared to her to reprove her for this fault. He spoke to her severely, and uttered words which were deeply engraved in her heart, and which she repeated afterwards to the mistress of novices. "What!" said he, "do you think to please God by passing the limits of obedience? Remember, that obedience is the chief virtue of this congregation, and not austerity."

It is related, in the lives of the fathers of the desert, that the holy priest Stephen, being in his

last illness, was obliged by his physicians to eat meat; a brother of his, a secular, but a very virtuous man, was shocked and exceedingly grieved that he who had lived so many years in such extreme abstinence and mortification, should, at the end of his life, eat flesh meat. Whilst occupied with these thoughts he fell into an ecstasy, and saw, in spirit, one standing by, who reprehended him for being scandalized without cause, at what his brother did through necessity and by obedience, and continued, "If you desire to know the merit and glory of your brother, turn and see him." Upon which, turning about, he saw his brother fastened to the cross with our Lord: "Behold," said the person that appeared to him, "the happy state of your brother, and learn to glorify Him who glorifies in this manner those that love Him in truth."

The evil one, says St. Francis of Sales, cares not about our mortifying the body, provided we do always what he wishes; he fears not austerity, but obedience. What greater austerity can there be than holding one's will continually subject and obedient?

When you gave yourself to God, after many prayers and much consideration, it was found good that you should enter into obedience and the denial of your own will, rather than be left to your own judgment and to yourself. Do not suffer yourself, then, to be overcome, but remain where our Lord has placed you.

But you complain that you cannot do such and such a penance you wish. Tell me, I reply, what better penance could an erring heart have than to endure a continual cross and denial of its self-love? But I say too much; God Himself will

hold you with that same hand of His mercy with which He placed you in this vocation; and the enemy will have no victory over you, but you must be well proved by temptation and well crowned by perseverance.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, when she was ill, always used to refuse any delicate food that might be offered her; but, if she was told to take it out of obedience, she took it without further scruple, exclaiming, "*Benedictus Deus.*"

But her strength in this virtue may be gathered from the fact, that when God, in rapture, ordered her to do anything, she would not do it without the permission of her superiors. Thus, when God commanded her to live on bread and water only, and her superiors, for a trial, forbade her to do so, she cheerfully obeyed, till, being satisfied with their trials, they gave her permission. When, in obedience to the command of God, she had begun to go barefoot and wear nothing but a ragged tunic, being ordered by her superiors to put on her shoes, she did so, and persevered, though her feet became so painful and inflamed that for many days she was compelled to drag herself on the ground on her hands and knees. Then she said to God, in rapture, "Oh, Lord, when I am with Thee I will obey Thee, whilst I am with them I will obey them;" and, in reply, God declared Himself pleased with her obedience.

SEVENTH DAY.

"A man who leads a common and ordinary life under obedience is more to be esteemed than one who does great penance after his own will."—*St. Philip.*

"Naturally we all have an inclination to command, and a great aversion to obey; and yet it is certain that it is more for our good to obey than to command; hence perfect souls have always had a great affection for obedience, and have found all their joy and comfort in it."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The saints well understood this truth, and considered it a great happiness to be under obedience. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi had such an affection for holy obedience, that, however difficult the task that was imposed upon her, and however fatigued at the moment, she never was known to show any repugnance or displeasure, but received all orders with a cheerful look, as if what was said gave her the greatest joy; and this was so really the case, that sometimes she had even fears lest she should have no merit in her obedience, seeing that she found in it so much spiritual delight and ease. But, not content with being subject to her superior, she voluntarily submitted also to her companions, and even to her inferiors. To this end she selected one in particular, whose permission she asked for even the most trifling actions that she was desirous to perform; and she obeyed her exactly. When she could not have her by her, she used to ask permission of some one else; and when, in any employment, she had a companion, she made a point of looking up to her as her superior for the time.

When St. Anselm was made Archbishop of

Canterbury, he became unhappy because he was so free from the yoke of obedience; and, at his own solicitation, the Pope appointed for the saint a superior, whom he might obey. The saint then regulated his conduct by the advice of this superior, and undertook nothing without his consent.

The venerable Father Pinamonti valued so much a life under holy obedience, that he submitted himself, with the utmost condescension, even to those who had no special authority over him, considering every one as his superior who afforded him an opportunity of practising this virtue, and denying his own will. It is incredible how great was his dependence upon Father Segneri, for twenty-six years, that he accompanied him on the missions. On every occasion he studied most carefully to accommodate himself to the inclination of his companion, subjecting himself to his wishes, and conforming himself to his every motion, with as much readiness and alacrity as if he had served him, not as a companion, but as a staff serves an old man without a will of his own. Nor was his obedience restricted to the particular duties of the missions: it extended over the whole of his conduct in their journeys, and their hours of repose and refreshment; in every particular of their common life, he showed such dependence as could not have have been exceeded by the most fervent novice in the cloister, and even scrupled at being withdrawn for ever so short a time from what was prescribed by Father Segneri.

It is related of St. Ignatius, that, although he was the founder and general of the Order, yet he took care to practise holy obedience in several

ways. Thus, when he was serving in the kitchen, he was as obedient to a sign from the cook, as others could be to a command from the general. He also yielded himself, without reserve, to the orders of physicians. Having observed the Lenten fast, with a willing spirit but a weak body, up to the Wednesday in Holy Week, he was attacked by a fever; and the physician, Alessandro Petronius, knowing that this was caused by his extreme weakness, desired him to take a little chicken in the evening; but Petronius had great suspicions that Ignatius would not consent to this during Holy Week, and wishing to know what he did, he asked him the next morning if he had done as he had prescribed. Ignatius said that he had, and Petronius rejoined: "I have known many who have fallen ill at this season, after observing the fast, who could hardly be induced, after great trouble, to touch flesh, but you have yielded to a single word: to tell you the truth, this astonishes me greatly." Ignatius, bending his head, replied: "But I must obey." Petronius often told this anecdote in his praise, and what is more, St. Francis of Sales relates it as a rare example of virtue, in one of his letters to St. Jane Frances de Chantal.

We also read of St. Alphonsus Liguori, that his submission to the doctors was most admirable: "They had scarcely spoken before they were obeyed. As he had a very delicate body, blisters were most painful to him; but he never sought to be exempted. He obeyed the physicians, not through the wish to prolong life, but because he recognised God's will in theirs. One day, amongst other things, the saint said to Doctor Farrara: 'I am nothing but an old man now: what can I

hope for or aspire to? I obey, in order to fulfil your will and that of God.'"

St. Philip Neri, the great apostle of Rome, behaved in the same manner. He was particularly obedient to physicians when under their care; and, although he had a great repugnance to medicine, he always submitted and took whatever was ordered. If they said he was to leave off saying Mass, or hearing Confessions, or making mental prayer, he did so immediately, without any expostulation or debate. Angelo of Bagnana once commanded him to desist from saying office forty days; and he obeyed without a word, although it was the keenest possible mortification to him.

EIGHTH DAY.

"Many religious and people in the world have made progress in the spiritual life without much prayer, but without obedience they have never made a single step."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"A single instant passed under simple obedience is immeasurably more valuable in the sight of God than an entire day spent in the most sublime contemplation."—*St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi.*

This saint esteemed subjection to community-life, and obedience to rule, above the most exalted practices of devotion: "For," said she, "in performing what is required by the rule, or obedience to superiors, we are sure that we perform the will of God, and are, consequently, gaining merit and pleasing Him; but we are not so well assured of

this in the best private devotion of our own choice."

This sentiment she amply confirmed by her example. It is related in her life, that her superioress would often call her when she was in rapture, and assign her various employments; the sound of her superior's voice was sufficient; she would instantly recover her senses, and perform the obedience; and often she would do this whilst still in rapture. Once, on the festival of the Assumption, as she was rapt in high contemplation, the prioress called her, and told her to serve at table, which she did, instantly recovering her senses, though in serving, she was so much abstracted, that at every step it seemed she would fall into rapture, which she did as soon as dinner was over.

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque entertained the same esteem and love for holy obedience. It is recorded, that having obtained permission from the superior, she for some years spent the whole night of Holy Thursday before the blessed Sacrament. She used to repair to the choir at half-past seven, and from that time till the next day she remained on her knees, her hands joined, without support, and motionless. God only knows the delight which this devotion afforded to her heart, all burning with divine love. A young sister, wishing to try whether vanity or simplicity had any share in this practice, asked permission of the superior to go in the middle of this holy night and interrupt Margaret's prayer. Having obtained this permission, she went and said to her, in a low voice: "Our mother orders you to go and warm yourself." The servant of God instantly obeyed, went to the

common room with fire, remained there a quarter of an hour, and then returned to resume her place before the blessed Sacrament.

This saint used to say, that when humility and obedience do not eminently adorn the soul, her lights ought to be suspected, however sublime they may appear; on the contrary, where humility without affectation, and obedience without delay, reserve, or murmuring exist, there, is the true spirit of God.

When souls are led to unusual practices or devotions, obedience is the safe test to ascertain whether the spirit which conducts them is truly the spirit of God, or whether it rather proceeds from hypocrisy, illusion of the devil, or the imagination of a brain puffed up with pride.

Sister Margaret was not spared in this. Her obedience was put to trials of all kinds, throughout the whole of her life, and remained firm and unalterable. Her superiors always found in her a full and blind submission to their will, and a continual distrust of her own illuminations; if, through inadvertence, she ever failed in obedience, she was always the first to accuse and humble herself for it, and often said, that nothing appeared to her so horrible in the house of God as a self-willed religious. Be sure, she would say, that humility, simplicity, and exact obedience, were never united with false virtues, nor can they ever be the fruit of the deceits of the devil.

The venerable Joseph Anchieta thus wrote to a religious, who seemed uneasy because the employments of obedience did not allow him much time for prayer: "The main point consists not in speaking but in doing well, and in knowing no other language than that of obedience—the

only one which God understands, and which in effect is His own language. Without obedience, all our prayers to God are useless, for He will not listen to a disobedient subject. I wish to make you understand, that when obedience keeps you so fully occupied that you have not time to pray, obedience itself prays for you, and surely is well accepted by Him who was obedient even unto death."

Whilst St. Simon Stylites was living upon a pillar forty cubits high, all absorbed in the contemplation of heavenly things, the holy solitaries of the oriental deserts having consulted together, sent to him, to ask why he led so strange a life, leaving the common road, which had been beaten by all the saints, and the holy fathers who had gone before him, and to order him, in their names, to come down immediately from his pillar; giving private instructions, however, to their messenger, that if Simon showed himself ready to obey, he must suffer him to remain, and encourage him to proceed in his undertaking, as he would show, by his ready obedience, that what he did was not from caprice, but by divine inspiration; but that, if he refused to obey, he must oblige him to come down by force. The deputy had no sooner delivered the message, than the saint, without making the least reply or delay, presently disposed himself to come down. Whereupon, the deputy told him to continue where he was, for the fathers judged his undertaking was from God.

St. Basil, the great master of religious perfection in the Oriental Church, thus addresses religious: "Make it a maxim never to do anything contrary to the advice, or without the knowledge

of your superior, for concealment is a kind of theft and sacrilege; such actions as you conceal are extremely prejudicial to you, and can never turn to your profit. I admit that you look upon them as good, but if so, why do you conceal them? Why do you not ask your superior's leave to do them? He seeks your good as much as you do yourself; apply to him, and if reasonable, he will not deny you, and then God will bless all your undertakings. Do not, for want of a little submission, do what is not only unprofitable, but also highly prejudicial to you, lest God reject you, and say to you, as He said once to His people by the prophet Isaias: 'Offer me no more of your unprofitable sacrifices.'"

The tree which God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of was not bad in itself, but, on the contrary, very good; yet, to give them an occasion to merit, by submission and obedience to their Creator, God was pleased to forbid them the use of that which, but for the prohibition, they could have eaten of very innocently. A superior sometimes acts in the same way with the religious that are under his care; he forbids them things that are in themselves good, either because these things are not proper for them, or to try their submission and obedience.

NINTH DAY.

"Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifice." (a)—*The Holy Prophet Samuel.*

"Obedience is justly preferred to holocausts and victims, because by sacrifices we offer to God the flesh of others, whereas by obedience we offer to Him our own will."—*St. Gregory.*

Whilst the blessed Claver was performing great wonders amongst the negroes, his superior ordered him to change entirely his method of instructing them, and to abandon certain practices, from which, up to that time, he had derived great fruit; he immediately obeyed, merely saying these words, which show his humility, as well as his obedience: "What a miserable creature I must be, since I cannot do a little good without occasioning a great deal of evil, and without troubling the whole house; but it is only what might be expected from an ignorant indiscreet person, from such a sinner as myself." Another time, when he went to give a mission at Tolu, a village at a considerable distance from Carthagena, and where he had already published the ordinary indulgences, he received a letter from the rector, desiring his return to the college. The parish priest, the officers, and soldiers, afflicted at losing him, used all their endeavours to detain him a few days, till they could write to the rector, representing the desolation of all the people, the misfortune of so many souls that then seemed disposed to profit by his labours, the weather, which was so extremely inclement, and the bad

(a) 1 Kings xvi. 22.

roads; all of which were sufficient and reasonable excuses, to which his superior could not object. But, notwithstanding all that could be said, and painful as it was to him to see his labours useless and so much fruit lost, nothing could stop him; he set out and reached Carthagena on the day appointed. It seemed as if God recompensed his obedience by a special protection, for as soon as he set out, the rain, which until then had been incessant, suddenly ceased.

The same spirit of perfect obedience shone most conspicuously in the blessed Leonard. Although he was aware of the good effect produced by his preaching, he declared that, if he was ordered to give up the missions entirely, he would obey readily, even joyfully; and he used to say that obedience was a virtue so pleasing to God that, without it, every good work lost its merit. Frequently, when he was employed in giving a mission, he received an order not to proceed to the places adjoining, in the same diocese, but to turn back to give one in a distant part of the country, and afterwards to return to the place whence he came; and, however unfavourable the season might be, and notwithstanding the pain and fatigue he endured from walking barefoot, he set off without delay, not considering the inconvenience for a moment. To one who urged him to explain to his superiors the difficulties he found, at his advanced age, in executing some of their orders, he wrote thus: "My father, we must obey; you touch the most delicate point in my conscience. I declare that for fifty years of my life, in religion, I have never had to confess having failed in holy obedience; and do you think that, now I am old, I would fail on this score?"

The venerable mother, Seraphina, had obtained from her director, who was absent at Naples, permission to receive the holy communion every day. He, nevertheless, advised her, in order to avoid the admiration of others, not to do so without each time asking permission of the ordinary confessor of the convent, who frequently denied her that inexpressible happiness; but, notwithstanding the pain it caused her, she always obeyed. On one of these occasions she was assisting at the adorable sacrifice of the mass, when she had a vision, in which it seemed to her that our blessed Lord invited her to receive the holy communion. This vision excited in her the most vehement desire to receive the adorable sacrament, yet she would not do so, convinced that, though she might be subject to an illusion in following a vision, she never could do wrong in obeying her confessor in all that was not sin.

It is related of St. John of the Cross, that, at the conclusion of his studies, when he embraced the conventual life, his director, perceiving that his great learning subjected him to some degree of vainglory, ordered him to confine his studies to the catechism, leaving all other books. This order he followed with the greatest exactness for a long time, and afterwards he said that it was to his docility, in adopting so humble an exercise, that he owed that gift of obedience, as well as many other virtues for which he became so conspicuous.

The historian of the life of St. Francis Xavier, describing his obedience, says that St. Ignatius had resolved to call him from the field of his missionary labours in the East, where he was performing such wonderful things for the good

of souls. St. Francis, at that time, was on the point of gaining whole kingdoms to Jesus Christ, notwithstanding which, St. Ignatius having written a letter only subscribed with a single I, to give him notice to return, doubted not that, upon the receipt of it, St. Francis would leave his glorious enterprises, forsake the Eastern world, and return forthwith to Rome, whither obedience called him. God called him to heaven, to receive the recompense of his labours before that letter came to his hands, or he certainly would have obeyed.

TENTH DAY.

"Would you know who are true religious? Those who, by the exercise of mortification, have so completely overcome their own wills that their only desire is to follow the precepts and counsels of their superiors."—*St. Fulgentius.*

"In religion there is no shorter path to arrive at perfection than that of obedience to superiors; hence I rely more on one of their words than on a hundred private revelations. When the superior orders me to do anything to which I have a repugnance, I will raise my heart to God, with the thought that He commands me to do it, and, without reply, I will obey with the promptitude of the angels, thanking Him for condescending to employ me in the execution of His will."—*Blessed Claver.*

THE blessed Claver's conduct was conformable to his principles, and the respect he bore to those who had authority over him was truly wonderful. His most intimate and familiar friends became objects of his veneration as soon as they became his superiors; he only considered in them Him whose place they held; and, as this character be-

longed to every superior, he may be said, in truth, never to have changed his superiors. He appeared before them like the youngest novice, in the most humble attitude, with his head uncovered, his eyes cast down, his mind attentive to the least sign of their will; and no difficulties or dangers could ever make him hesitate for a moment when he once became aware of what they required of him; hence his superiors never failed to throw all that was most painful upon him, being sure of meeting with no opposition, and being delighted also to get rid of the difficulty of finding people always disposed to obey. But his obedience and respect were not confined to the mere fulfilment of the orders of his superiors; his whole heart was open to them; he gave them an exact detail of his prayers and the movements of his soul, begging them to guide and reform him in the manner they judged most proper; for he who was so great a master to others did not believe he could decide anything right for himself, holding it as a maxim, that as we never see ourselves correctly, we never can judge correctly for ourselves, and, consequently, always need the guidance, as well as the vision, of another.

To be the better assured of his perfect obedience, his superiors often subjected it to the severest tests. One day, after giving him a very severe reprimand, he was desired to remain on his knees till further orders. Although he was then very aged and infirm, he remained so for nearly an hour, feeling great joy in this mortification, and determined to remain there the whole day, if his penance had not been changed.

St. Philip had such a horror of disobedience that, when any one had shown a notable repug-

nance to any duty, it mattered not what, he wished him immediately to leave the congregation. Upon this subject we may quote what was found in one of his manuscripts: "In case the man does not know how to go on without making a trouble, either about meals or the church, or whatever else is wanted of him, let him ask leave to separate himself from the congregation as quickly as possible, for otherwise, after the first or second offence, his dismissal will be given him; for I am positively resolved not to keep any in the house who are not observers of the few orders which are given them."

St. Vincent of Paul acted in the same manner with the members of his congregation. He used to tell them that the virtue of obedience, combined with regularity, was the soul, and, as it were, the substance, of religion; that all the good of the creature consists in fulfilling the designs of God, and that they are not fulfilled but by the faithful practice of obedience; that, in fine, those who are in heart disunited from their superiors, who murmur against them, who contradict them, are guilty of interior apostasy. He added, that obedience, to be perfect, must be voluntary, because it should spring from the heart or affection; prompt, because true obedience admits no excuse or delay; courageous, because it should not be arrested by the sight of obstacles; persevering, because it is necessary to obey like Jesus Christ, Who obeyed even unto death.

St. Francis of Sales, addressing the nuns of the Visitation, says: "Every sister, on entering the religious state, ought to leave her own will at the convent gate, so as no longer to follow any other will than that of God." This is just what St.

Dositheus attested of himself: from his first entrance into religion, he had stripped himself entirely of his own will, subjecting it to that of his superior, making known to him all his temptations and desires; and, by this practice, he declared that he had gained such peace of heart and such tranquillity of soul as nothing could disturb.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, on the day of her clothing, prostrated herself in the humblest manner, with a heart full of love for holy obedience, before the mistress of novices; and, in doing this, gave herself up entirely to follow her will in all things, saying to her, that she put herself into her hands to do with her whatever she pleased, and that she would obey her in every respect; moreover, she besought her to humble and mortify her, without any regard to her natural inclinations. When the mistress of novices was succeeded by another nun, the humble Mary Magdalene repeated the same act of submission. Nor was it merely in words that this blessed servant of God testified her love for this holy virtue; during her whole noviciate she observed the most perfect submission to the orders of the mistresses; whatever they bid her do she performed without a moment's reluctance or the least sign of dislike, and thus arrived at such perfection in this virtue that she seemed wholly divested from all self-love or attachment to her own opinion, as if she had none at all, or that what she ever had was dead within her.

ELEVENTH DAY.

"He who has not the virtue of obedience is not worthy of the name of a religious; and it is a wonder that any man who has made a vow of obedience, and, by not using all his endeavours to accomplish this vow as perfectly as possible, fails therein, should remain in the religious state at all."—*St. Teresa.*

"A disobedient religious is destitute of every other virtue, for obedience decides the character of a religious person, since it is the true and peculiar virtue of the religious state."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Thomas teaches that the essence of the religious life consists chiefly in the vow of obedience; for, suppose any one to live in voluntary poverty and chastity, or even engage himself to such a life by vow, this would not make him a religious, nor could he rise to the perfect state of religion without adding the vow of obedience. St. Bonaventure is of the same opinion, and says, that the perfection of a religious man consists in denying his own will, and following the will of his superiors; and that the vow of poverty and chastity, by which we renounce riches and sensual pleasures, are only helps to disengage us from temporal things and from the allurements of the flesh, that we may be better able to comply with our main obligation, which is obedience; and therefore, he adds, that it will signify nothing to have renounced all the goods of fortune, unless we deny our own will also, and entirely submit to all the injunctions of holy obedience.

The venerable Mary Alcoque thus writes in one of her letters: "The divine Saviour has many times told me that there is nothing so hurtful to

people in religion as want of obedience, however slight; the least transgression on this point is a great defect in the eyes of God."

St. Alphonsus Liguori considered the virtue of obedience the guarantee for the continuance of a religious house. "When obedience and subordination are wanting," he used to say, "a religious house cannot long subsist; and what would have been made a paradise by concord, becomes a hell by diversity of sentiment."

"Remember," says St. John of the Cross, "that thou hast been put under thy superior for the love of our Lord, and in order to gain the kingdom of heaven; consequently, thou art no longer thy own, but his under whose authority thou hast been placed: it is, therefore, no longer lawful for thee to do anything of thy own will, or contrary to that of thy superior, for he, and not thyself, is the master of thy will."

"The habit and the tonsure," says the Imitation of Christ, "effect little; but change of manners and entire mortification of the passions make a true religious. He that seeks in religion anything but God and the salvation of his soul, will find nothing but trouble and sorrow; man comes to religion to serve, and not to govern—to suffer, not to enjoy—to labour, not to be idle. Here men are tried as gold in the furnace; here no man can remain, unless he be willing, with all his heart, to humble himself for the love of God."

St. Philip was most careful to train up the members of his congregation in the practice of perfect obedience. For this purpose he gave them frequent opportunities of mortifying and subduing their own judgment. When he gave an obedience to any one, and saw that he had a

great repugnance to it, or excused himself, he pressed it on him more than ever. He often sent his subjects to do things at hours and times which were contrary to the dictates of human prudence, expressly to keep his spiritual children in an humble opinion of themselves, and that they might exercise themselves, as he used to say, *in mirabilibus super se.*

This saint set a great value upon those religious who obey blindly and without reasoning; but when, on the contrary, any one debated about an obedience, or made any answer when an order was given, whatever other estimable qualities he had, Philip made no account of him, for he said that things done of our own will were not so meritorious as those which were done under obedience: and, although he was one of the mildest of men, he showed himself extremely stern to those who failed in obedience, and rebuked them very harshly; he treated them as persons who disturbed the public peace, and said, "Take it as an infallible truth, that what is commanded by those who hold the place of God in our regard, is really the best and most perfect thing we can find to do, whatever appearances there may be to the contrary." Some of his spiritual children were almost daily joining religious orders; and whenever, in after life, they came to visit him, he was wont to give them this advice, that if they were doing any good, and actually converting souls, and obedience removed them from where they then were to another place, willingly and without a word to leave everything, even although the fruit was certain in the one place, and the possibility of it in the place to which they were ordered very doubtful, because the command was a sign

that God did not wish to have that fruit by their means.

It is not enough, as he often used to say, to know that God wishes to have that good done at which we aim, but we must also learn if He wishes to have it done through our instrumentality, and at this time, all which, we can only discern by true obedience. He used to admonish them, also, that, to be perfect, it was not enough to obey and honour superiors, but we must honour our equals and inferiors also. He repeatedly told confessors that they did very ill when they had any opportunity of exercising their penitents in this virtue of obedience, and, through negligence or human respects, omitted to do so; and he besought them earnestly rather to mortify the will and understanding of their spiritual children by obedience than to impose upon them a multiplicity of corporal penances. It was a favourite maxim of his, that to mortify one passion, however small, helped the penitent on far more than many abstinences, fasts, and disciplines.

The blessed Rodriguez, a lay brother of the society of Jesus, used to recommend this maxim to any religious, who sincerely wishes to advance in holiness and to enjoy true peace: "Let him prefer nothing to obedience, whoever commands, submitting to all creatures for the sake of God, and doing all that is required of him with great peace of mind; if, however, he cannot do all, and is asked the reason, let him be content with simply saying, that he could not; and for the rest, to all that may be said, let him answer nothing—no, absolutely nothing; whatever reproaches may be made, let him be silent, accepting all for the sake of God, provided he has done nothing contrary

to God. This is, indeed, the way to vanquish self."

The venerable founder of the order of the Mother of God, being urged by his disciples to give them a rule, wrote this single word, *obedience*. He wished by this act to signify that, in religion, obedience and sanctity are identical; that to be obedient and to be a saint are one and the same thing.

TWELFTH DAY.

"There is nothing more dangerous in the spiritual life than to wish to be our own masters."—*St. Philip.*

"He who follows his own ideas in opposition to the direction of his superiors, needs no devil to tempt him, for he is a devil to himself."—*St. John Climachus.*

This saint quotes several examples of hermits, given to prayer and advanced in spirituality, who, trusting too much to their own reason, and becoming their own directors, were at last deceived by the devil's illusions. One of them the devil urged to sacrifice his own son, who lived in the same monastery with him; and the poor man, imagining that he should hereby become another Abraham, would certainly have put the suggestion into execution, had not his son, seeing him prepare the cords and whet his knife, suspected his design, and fled from him. Another he persuaded to throw himself down a precipice, and made him believe that he should thus obtain a crown of martyrdom, and go immediately to heaven.

Cassian likewise cites the case of Heron the hermit, who lived in great retirement and abstinence; and upon Easter-day, when all the hermits used to dine together, and have better fare than usual, stayed in his cell, and made no addition to his ordinary fare, which was only bread and water. This man, from his austere life, became so proud and wedded to his own opinion, that he persuaded himself he was a great saint, that he was superior to all dangers in this life, and that, if he should throw himself headlong into a well, angels would bear him up, and preserve him from being hurt. Full of this fancy, and not doubting but that God would perform a miracle to make his virtue and merit known to the world, he threw himself one night into a deep well, out of which, some of the brethren, who ran thither upon hearing the noise of his fall, with great difficulty pulled him up, half-dead; but the illusion of the devil had gained such hold upon him, that for the three days he lived after this rashness, neither his own unhappy experience, nor all that his brethren could say to disabuse him of his error and make him repent, could efface the impression from his mind.

St. Chrysostom says, that he who depends altogether upon his own judgment, though he may be most deeply versed in spiritual matters, is in far greater danger of falling than one who is a novice in the spiritual life, but who gives himself up to the conduct of another. He compares the first to a skilful pilot, who, trusting to his art and abilities, puts to sea in a ship that has neither sail nor oar; the second to a passenger, who, though altogether unacquainted with sea affairs, embarks in a well-appointed vessel, with an experienced master. It

is then a great mistake to imagine that we can please God by following our own views, when opposite to obedience. St. Thomas Aquinas says, that "a person might distribute all his property to the poor, and even lay down his own life, but if he does not direct these things to the fulfilment of the Divine will, which properly belongs to obedience, he can acquire no merit." St. Francis of Sales teaches the same, and says, that even the desire of suffering martyrdom would avail us nothing, if we do not possess obedience. We read, in the life of Pacomius, that one of his religious, who had persevered during the time of his noviciate in exemplary humility and submission, afterwards went to the saint, and, in a transport of fervour, told him that he had a great desire of martyrdom, that he should never be satisfied till he found the opportunity, and begged him most humbly to pray God that his wish might be gratified. The holy father laboured to moderate this ardour, but the more he attempted to say on the subject, the more positive and urgent did the disciple become. The saint said: "My son, it is better to live in obedience and die daily by continual mortification of our own wills, than to be ambitious of any torture which our imagination may picture: the man who mortifies himself as he ought to do, gains a sufficiently glorious crown of martyrdom. It is a greater martyrdom to persevere all our lives in obedience than to die at once by the sword. Live in peace, my son; pacify your mind, divert it from this desire." The young religious, however, constantly urged that his desire proceeded from the Holy Ghost, and, far from abating his ardour, perpetually harassed the holy father with importunities that he would

pray for the accomplishment of his views. Some time after a report reached the monastery which promised him satisfaction; a predatory band of idolaters took up their abode in a mountain near the monastery. On this, St. Pacomius called the young religious to him, and said, "My son, the hour you have so long desired is come; go to the mountain and cut wood." The religious, filled with joy, went out singing psalms of thansgiving to God, and lost in thanks for being thought worthy to suffer death for His love. His only thought was the accomplishment of his favourite object. The robbers met him, and immediately began to handle him roughly and threaten his life. At first he retained his courage. "Thou art a dead man," said they; "I seek for nothing better than to die for God," was his reply, with many similar protestations. The barbarians then conducted him to their idol, and required him to adore it. On finding their words ineffectual, they prepared their weapons to take his life. Then, however, the poor man, who was so strong in imagination, perceiving the point of the sword directed to his throat, called loudly for mercy. "I entreat you," said he, "not to kill me; I will do whatever you desire; have compassion on me, I am yet young; it would be a pity to cut me off in the flower of my youth." He at length consented to adore the idol; after which the robbers, with disdainful scorn, beat him unmercifully, and then suffered him to return to his monastery. On returning, in a state of deathly paleness, with disaster painted on his countenance, he was met by St. Pacomius, who said to him, "Well, my son, what is the matter? what is the cause of this melancholy appearance?" The poor man, filled

with shame and confusion, and mastering the spirit of pride, which had brought him to this great crime, threw himself on the ground, and confessed his fault. The holy father applied a prompt remedy, enjoining the community to pray for him, and requiring him to ask pardon of God, he brought him into good dispositions, and gave him also some excellent admonitions.

"There are souls," writes St. Francis of Sales, "who, as they say, will be led only by the spirit of God, and fancy all their imaginations so many inspirations and movements of the Holy Ghost, who takes them by the hand, and conducts them like children in all that they should do; but in this they greatly deceive themselves, for is there any vocation more marvellous than that of St. Paul, for whose conversion our Lord Himself appeared? Nevertheless, He would not instruct him, but sent him to Ananias to learn what he had to do.

"Shall we think ourselves more favoured by God than St. Paul, and believe that He wills to conduct us Himself, without the instrumentality of any creature? Certainly, all are not conducted by the same road, but it is also true that we do not ourselves know by what road God calls us; that belongs to superiors, who have light of God to distinguish it. We must not say that they do not know us well, for we ought to know that obedience and submission are the true marks of a good inspiration; and although it may happen that we have no consolation in the exercises they propose to us, and that we have much in others, it is not by consolation that we ought to judge of the goodness of our actions; to regard, on these occasions, our own satisfaction, would be to regard the flowers and not the fruit."

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"Do whatever may be prescribed you by holy obedience, throwing yourself into the sea of Divine Providence. This is the way to live in peace and die in peace, and we may be certain that the more frequently we allow ourselves to be turned and tried in obedience, the more perfect peace we shall have. Let us make this generous declaration to our superiors: 'Fathers, behold us at sea, guide us to shore; we are ready for any obedience, without reservation.' When we have made this resolution, we shall be at peace."—*Blessed Leonard.*

"A child in the arms of his mother has no concern for any event that may take place, and cares not whether she carry him on the right arm or the left. In the same manner, the obedient man is never disturbed at what is commanded; when the command is given, and he is permitted to remain in the arms of obedience, he is satisfied. To such a person I can, in the name of God, promise everlasting happiness; and in this mortal life he will, undoubtedly, enjoy the securest tranquillity."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

How great is the peace and quiet enjoyed by him who sees God in the person of his superior, and thus looks upon himself as in the hands of God, Who will ever, he is confident, take care of him! He, indeed, can say with the prophet, "In this hope will I sleep, and rest in peace." It is God that takes care of me; I shall want for nothing. I am in very good hands, for it is certain that nothing can happen to me but what God wills and what He designs for my good.

"O great and abundant happiness!" exclaims St. Jerome; "O extraordinary grace of holy obedience! For obedience is a compendium of virtues, because it leads directly to Jesus Christ; and if we follow the way which it points out to us, we shall soon become perfect men."

St. Catherine of Bologna used to say, that "a truly and heartily obedient religious is, of all persons, most happy; first, because, as he is dependent on another, however heavy his burden may be, he does not feel it; secondly, because he is sure of an approving conscience, which is the soul's treasure. Yes," she would add, "he who is always obedient, as he ought to be, will always be tranquil, joyous, and secure." She called obedience, on account of its dignity, the terrestrial Paradise, the ark of delight, the joy of the angels; and sometimes said, "Accept, accept, the chalice of obedience. How much sweeter is the yoke of obedience now, since the Son of God became obedient to the death of the cross. Which of us who considers that Jesus made Himself subject to the most criminal and abject of men, and allowed them to treat Him as they pleased, would not joyfully place himself under obedience, one precept of which is enough to fill the heart with wonderful consolation?"

"Many are under obedience," says the Following of Christ, "more out of necessity than for the love of God; such as these are in pain, and easily repine, and will not gain freedom of mind unless they submit themselves, with their whole heart, for God's sake. Run here or there, thou wilt find no rest but in an humble subjection to the government of a superior. The imagination of change of places, has deceived many."

The blessed Egidius received permission from St. Francis to choose whatever convent or province he pleased to dwell in, but he had scarcely enjoyed the liberty four days when he perceived his soul tormented with an unwonted disquietude, and, judging by the light of the Holy Ghost what

was the cause, he came back to the saint, and begged him to determine immediately where should be his abode, even to the hour of his death, and no longer to leave it to his own choice, for the enjoyment of this liberty had robbed him of his peace of mind.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, at the hour of death, declared that she found nothing in her past life to give her so much comfort as the consideration that she had never been guided in anything by her own will and judgment, but always by the will and judgment of her superiors and directors.

The venerable Joseph Anchieta, on hearing one of the fathers remark, that if a subject wishes to enjoy perpetual peace of soul, he must leave himself entirely in the hands of his superior, being content with whatever office or occupation he is pleased to assign him, rejoined, "Yes, without this the religious has no remedy, no security against temptations and assaults, to which he is liable at every turn."

"Obedience," says St. Francis of Sales, "is not of less merit than charity. To give a cup of water from charity will win heaven. Do as much from obedience, and you will also win heaven. The least thing done by obedience is very agreeable to God. If you eat by obedience, your eating will be more agreeable to God than any fasts or austerities done without obedience. If you rest by obedience, your rest is more agreeable to God than labour done without obedience." Finally, he who obeys as he ought "will enjoy a continual tranquillity, and the most holy peace of the Lord, which surpasseth all understanding."

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"It is a very great thing to be under obedience, to live under a superior, and not to be at our own disposal. To be in subjection is much more secure than to be in authority."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"He who always acts under obedience may be assured that he will not have to give an account of his actions to God."—*St. Philip.*

THIS doctrine, on the safety of obedience, is common to all the saints. They unanimously teach that the truly obedient have nothing to fear, and may always be sure of doing right. "Obey your prelates," says St. Paul, "and be subject to them, for they watch as having to render an account of your souls." These words are a source of great comfort and consolation to the obedient, because they show that it is not the duty of subjects, but of superiors, to give an account to God of what is enjoined.

The superior may be sometimes faulty in commanding this or that, but the subject can never be so in obeying, for God will only ask us if we have done what was commanded us; and, if we can give a good account of ourselves on this point, we may be sure of having done our duty. We shall not be asked, whether what we have done was to the purpose, or the best thing we could undertake, since this does not belong to us, but to our superior. As long as we comply with obedience, if anything be amiss, God takes it off from our account, and places it to our superior's. It is for this reason St. Jerome, speaking of the advantages of obedience, ex-

claimed, "O Sovereign liberty! O happy and holy security, which renders us almost impeccable!"

St. John Climachus is of the same opinion, who says, that obedience excuses us before God; and it is certain that when Almighty God asks us why we have done this or that, if we answer that we were commanded to do so by our superiors, we shall need no other excuse for acquittal." The saint says again, "That to obey is to sail in safety, and sleep during the passage; for as a passenger in a stout ship, steered by an able pilot, has nothing to trouble him, but may sleep securely, because the pilot is careful and vigilant, so a religious who lives under the yoke of obedience goes to heaven sleeping, that is, totally depending upon the conduct of his superiors, who are his pilots, and watch for him." All must admit that it is no little advantage to be carried in the arms of another through all the difficulties and storms of this life; and this is the favour God vouchsafes to those who live under obedience. It is the superior who bears the whole burthen; subjects need not concern themselves whether this or that be fittest to be done; they have nothing else to do but to live in repose, and rely upon their superior, who is their guide.

All religious have, like the children of Israel, a Moses that goes up the mountain, and declares the will of God to them. They have a prophet, to clear their doubts; so that, whensoever they have any difficulty, they can say as the Israelites said on the like occasion, "Let us go and consult him that sees." They called their prophet, "the man that sees," because he saw and knew the will of God, and then declared it to the people. When,

under obedience, we have the same advantage they had, and can say, in all our doubts and difficulties, "Let us consult him that sees." Let us address ourselves to him whom God has given us for a prophet, to him who holds the place of God Himself, and can make known His will to us. Nay, we may justly apply these words of Baruch to ourselves, "We Israelites are happy, because we know what pleases God."

A lay-brother, being dangerously sick, St. Bernard visited him, and encouraged him to be cheerful, because he would soon have passed from suffering to eternal repose. "Yes," replied he, "I confide in the mercy of God, and I feel certain that, in a short time, I shall enjoy the sight of His Divine Majesty;" but the saint, fearing lest this confidence should savour of presumption, reproved him in this manner: "What is this you say, my brother? Remember, that when you were so miserably off in the world as not to have a place to dwell in, God placed you in this abode, in which you have lived so well, enjoying so many comforts, and yet now, instead of thanking Him for this favour, you pretend still farther to His kingdom, as if it were your inheritance." "Ah, my father," replied the dying man, "what you say is most true; but have you not preached that the kingdom of God is not purchased by riches or nobility, but by the virtue of obedience? Well, I have constantly clung to this doctrine, and, by God's grace, I have never failed to obey every one that commanded me; why then may I not hope for what you have promised me?" This answer greatly pleased the saint, and, after his death, he told it, to the edification of the brethren.

It is, then, of the highest importance that we commit ourselves entirely to the direction of obedience, and allow ourselves to be led by our superiors as children by their parents.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"An obedient man shall speak of victory." (a)—*The Wise Man.*
"They who obey are conquerors, because, by submitting themselves to obedience, they triumph over the angels, who fell through disobedience."—*St. Gregory.*

Our blessed Redeemer, through his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, despoiled the principalities and powers, triumphing over them in Himself; and the Divine Father, as the reward of His obedience, exalted Him to the highest throne of glory, giving Him a name which is above every name, that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father!

Another striking instance of the happy effects which obedience produces is the reward which God granted to His faithful servant Abraham. This holy patriarch, on being commanded by God to offer Isaac to Him as an holocaust, made no delay, nor doubted in the least of God's still fulfilling His promise to him; accordingly

(a) Prov. xxi. 28.

he put all things in readiness, blindly to execute God's orders. He took his son, bound him, laid him upon the altar, and had his arm lifted up ready to sacrifice him. He still hoped, says St. Paul, even against hope, that in him he should be the father of many nations. Natural reason told him that, when Isaac was sacrificed, the promises of God in him would fail, but supernatural hope vanquished this diffidence of nature, and Abraham, without counting difficulties, firmly believed that God would perform His promise, either by raising Isaac from the dead or by some other unknown way. Distrust did not stop him, because he was strengthened by faith, giving glory to God, and knowing most certainly that God was able to fulfil the promise He had made. So pleasing was this obedience to God, that, immediately upon it, He promised Abraham that the Messias should descend lineally from him, and that thus his posterity should be as numerous as the stars. "I have sworn by Myself," saith He, "that since thou hast done this, and not spared thy only son for My sake, I will bless thee, and will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea-shore. Thy posterity shall be masters of their enemies' towns, and all nations shall be blessed in thy seed, because thou hast obeyed My voice." "Consider," says St. Jerome, upon this passage, "how much God was pleased by Abraham's blind obedience, since He rewarded it so generously; for one son whom he would have sacrificed upon earth, He promised him a progeny equal in number to the stars of heaven."

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque thus wrote to a nun who was beginning her noviciate:

"Since God has placed you in the bark of a holy religious life, you have nothing to do but to abandon yourself blindly to be conducted by holy obedience, a true sign of the will of God respecting you. In all things have no other desire or intention than to please God; regard Him only in all that happens to you."

"Remember that Jesus was obedient even to the death of the cross. Endeavour to conform yourself in all to Jesus, who loves you, to Jesus crucified; do all by love and for love; and employ well the present moments, without being uneasy for the future."

"Place over the eyes of your soul the bandage of holy and loving submission to God, and to holy obedience for the love of Him. Act with the simplicity of a child towards those who conduct you; conceal nothing from them, either of good or bad, and God will bless you. Remain hidden in the sacred heart of Jesus, and as it were annihilated to the eyes of creatures, thinking of nothing but how to humble yourself and to do well whatever obedience requires of you."

St. Francis, being once lodged in the suburbs of Assisi, saw, with the penetrating sight which the Almighty had given him, devils who excited the citizens to massacre each other, and who appeared to be transported with joy. To put these evil spirits to flight, he sent Sylvester as his herald, and gave him this command: "Go to the gate of the town, and, standing before it, order the devils, in the name of Almighty God, and in virtue of obedience, instantly to retire." Sylvester, who was a man of extraordinary simplicity, praising God beforehand for what was about to happen, went as fast as possible and cried with all his

might, "All you devils who are here, begone—go far from hence; it is in the name of God and of His servant Francis, that I call upon you to go." At this very moment the citizens, who were on the point of taking arms in a civic quarrel, came to an understanding on the points which were in dispute, and peace was restored to the town. St. Bonaventure, speaking of this, remarks that St. Francis had obtained that absolute power over the proud spirits, by his obedience and humility.

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"There are three sorts of obedience; the first, obedience when a strict obligation is imposed on us, and this is good; the second, when the simple word of the superior, without any strict command, suffices for us, and this is better; the third, when a thing is done without waiting for an express command, from a knowledge that it will be pleasing to the superior, and this is best of all."—*St. Ignatius.*

"He that is truly obedient does not wait for a command, but as soon as he knows what his superior wishes to have done, immediately sets himself to work, without expecting an order."—*Blessed Albert the Great.*

When David, in the cave of Odollam, merely expressed a wish to drink the water of the cistern of Bethlehem, three valiant men made their way through the enemies' ranks, to procure him water from that place; showing thereby their promptitude, in complying with the king's wishes. And all the saints have acted in the same manner towards their superiors, in order to show a ready

conformity to the intentions of our Lord, the King of kings.

Cassian, speaking of the ancient hermits, says, that their obedience was so zealous and exact that they did not only obey the superior's voice, but even the least sign of his will; which made him think that they sometimes foresaw what was to be done; frequently preventing their superior's command, and performing what he had only resolved on, but not declared to them.

A servant, who, upon the least hint given him, sets himself to work, certainly pleases his master better than another that will do nothing without being commanded. So in religion; he that is ready to obey upon the least sign of his superior's will, is most agreeable to God. St. Thomas says, that our knowledge of the superior's will is a tacit order, and that our performance of it then is a proof of prompt obedience. This is the obedience we are to aim at, and the more so because sometimes the superior will not lay an express command upon us, being desirous to treat us mildly, and not give us too great a mortification, lest we should not relish the command; so that, if we should know the inclinations of the superior, we should do ill if we did not anticipate his will, and offer ourselves to perform what he secretly wishes we should do.

St. Francis Xavier was so disposed for every act of obedience, that, although he was labouring in the Indies with great success in the conversion of souls, and with much satisfaction to himself, he used to say, that, if he were in the midst of a most successful mission, and should receive an intimation from St. Ignatius, his superior, to re-

turn immediately into Italy, he would forthwith interrupt his labours to set out.

Another illustrious example of this was St. Felix the Capuchin, who, at the least sign of his superior's will, was always so ready cheerfully to execute all which they imposed upon him, however arduous, disagreeable, or various, and that, without any exception, that they were obliged to be upon their guard never to show their will, without some urgent cause, in presence of the holy man, for the slightest expression he regarded in the light of a positive command, and acted upon it with the utmost punctuality.

We read, in the life of the venerable Margaret Mary Alacoque, that, through her great love of penance, she was sometimes led to mortify herself, not indeed against the order of her superior, but before receiving permission. Our divine Saviour reproved her for this very severely; "Thou deceivest thyself," said He to her one day, "in thinking to please Me by practising this kind of mortification, that has been chosen by self-will, which would rather have the will of superiors bend before it than bend itself. Know that I reject all such things like fruits that self-will has turned to rottenness, for self-will in a religious soul excites My abhorrence. It is more agreeable to Me that such a soul should remain in ease and quiet through obedience, than load itself through caprice with austerities and fasts."

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"In order to be truly obedient, it does not suffice to do that which obedience commands; we ought to do it, moreover, without reasoning upon it, and hold it as a certain maxim, that what is commanded is the best and most perfect thing for us to do, even though it appeared the contrary."—*S. Philip.*

"The practice of obedience, to be entire, must be threefold—in the act, the will, and the judgment. In the act, performing promptly, cheerfully, and punctually whatever our superior enjoins; in the will, desiring nothing but what our superior desires; in the judgment, thinking the command of our superior right."—*St. Ignatius.*

THE saints generally distinguish two sorts of obedience, the one imperfect, the other perfect. The one discusses every command, the other obeys without reasoning. The first is always more inclined to one thing than another, and is never indifferent upon the matter: the second is like the needle of a balance, which, without leaning this or that way, is always equally disposed to be drawn in either direction. The first complies exteriorly by executing the orders given, but resists interiorly, and consequently does not deserve the name of obedience. The second is not only content to do what is appointed, but submits the will and understanding also to the superior, and does not even seek out reasons for obeying, always concluding that he has reason for what he does. The bare consideration of the superior's command is the only motive of its obedience. This is properly the blind obedience which the saints and spiritual writers so constanly recommend, and of which they have left us such great examples in

their own practice. But when they command this obedience, which they call blind, they do not mean that we should render an indiscriminate submission to everything commanded, to the breach of a clear and moral law. This would be a very dangerous error, as St. Ignatius observes. Their meaning is, that in all things where there appears no sin, we ought not to discuss the case, but to obey with a holy simplicity of heart, concluding our superior's command to be conformable to the law of God, making this command, and obedience itself, the chief motive why we obey. Cassian calls this an obedience without discussion or examination; for, in effect, we ought to perform simply what is commanded, and not exert ourselves to examine or find out the reasons for the command. St. John Climacus says, in like manner, that obedience is a movement of the will, without previous discussion or examination. He calls it also a voluntary death, a life void of curiosity, and an entire renouncing of our own discernment. St. Basil, upon the words of Christ, "feed my sheep," which were spoken to St. Peter, and in him to all ecclesiastical superiors, says: "As sheep follow their shepherd, and are led by him to what place he pleases, so a religious ought to be guided by, and follow his, superior, obeying him blindly, without reasoning on his orders."

St. Bernard says, that perfect obedience, especially in beginners, ought not to ask what or wherefore, but endeavour to execute faithfully and submissively what is commanded.

"True obedience," says St. Gregory, "neither examines the superior's command nor the end he proposes, for the man who has really given up himself entirely to the conduct of his superior

never finds greater satisfaction than in obeying his orders. He who knows well how to obey, does not know how to interpose his own judgment, since he knows obedience to be his greatest good. The questioning of a single divine prohibition cost our first parents very dear: their ruin and ours takes its date from it. By this the devil wrought their fall. "Why," said the evil one, "has God forbidden you to eat of the fruits that grow in Paradise?" Eve answered, "That thereby they might avoid death," for God, speaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, said expressly, "In the day you eat of this fruit you shall die;" yet, from this very production of a secondary motive, Eve began to fall, for she began to doubt the meaning of God's threat. She fixed her eyes on the threat, instead of on God, and imagined that it was only to affright them that the threat was made; and this thought very much disposed her afterwards to be deceived, for the devil laid hold of this advantageous occasion, and said, "you shall not die, but by eating you shall come to the knowledge of good and evil, and become like gods yourselves." Thus he persuaded them that God had laid the prohibition upon them lest they should grow as wise as Himself; and Eve, carried away with a desire of being raised above her present condition, gave credit to the serpent, eat of the forbidden fruit, and made Adam eat with her. Here you see that our first parents, by reasoning, disobeyed, and incurred immediately the death of their souls, subjected themselves to the death of the body, and were for ever driven out of the garden of Eden. And as this stratagem of the devil against our first parents succeeded so well, he has made use of it ever since against their

posterity. This made St. Paul, who knew the devil's craft, forewarn us, saying: "I fear lest the serpent, who so artfully seduced Eve, should corrupt your minds also, and make you fall from that simplicity which Christ demands of you." Take care that you be not deceived by this old serpent; apply yourselves to what is commanded you, executing it punctually, without examining the reasons or motives for which it is enjoined. This prompt and blind obedience will serve you as an infallible rule in everything you do; it is of great importance in the beginning to accustom ourselves to a blind obedience, for it is morally impossible that a novice should persevere in religion if he follows the common rules of human prudence, desiring to know the reason of everything commanded. What, therefore, must he do; how must he behave himself? Let him become a fool, that he may become wise; let all his discretion be, to have none at all, whilst he obeys; and let his wisdom and prudence never appear in matters of obedience. It belongs to the superior to examine and consider well things before he commands; but the subject's duty is to execute the orders that are once given, with humility, confidence, and simplicity; in brief, the superior is to reason the case, and the subject is to obey.

St. Ignatius used to say, particularly when he received any new members, that they who obey only with the will, without submitting the judgment, must know that they have but one foot in the school of Christ. He laid down many maxims by which we might attain to this perfection, and, amongst others, the following:—

1. You must surrender yourselves entirely into God's hand's, and trust to His sweet providence,

which confers grace on every man, according to his condition. He it is who guides the superior to command rightly, and He also assists the subject to obey well.

2. You must keep your eyes firmly fixed upon your vocation, and not look upon him who governs, but upon Jesus Christ, in whose stead he governs.

3. You must not listen to those reasons which are suggested by the sensual part of your nature; but piously search out those which induce to obedience.

4. Look continually at the examples of the saints who are distinguished for their perfect obedience, and, above all, to the example of Christ, who was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

5. Be fervent in prayer, and in mortifying self-love and self-esteem, considering how often our high opinions of ourselves are the delusions of our own minds; and resolve, with the apostle, "not to know more than it is needful to know.

In order to accustom his subjects to a blind obedience, he used to order things that were useless or unreasonable, or apparently incongruous—as, at the same time, to be preacher and procurator, teacher of philosophy and of grammar. Sometimes he would send for priests who were prepared to celebrate the adorable sacrifice, and, having made them take off their vestments, send them back again. One priest was already vested, and, with the chalice in his hand, just stepping out of the sacristy, when Ignatius, who had been watching him, suddenly sent for him, and bid him take off his vestments, and put on his cloak, to leave the house. Without a word of reply, he

obeyed, and came to the saint, with his cloak on. He then asked him if he had been at all disturbed by the command. "Not in the least," answered the priest. "Know, then," he replied, "That I gave the command not because I had need of you, but to establish you in obedience; and rest assured that you have merited more by leaving the sacrifice than if you had accomplished it; for, though the value of the sacrifice be above all price, still, we read in Scripture, that 'obedience is better than sacrifice.'"

One day the venerable John Berkmans, having gone out three or four times when the weather was oppressively hot, in the middle of summer, to accompany some persons who had asked the superior to send him with them, one of his companions, moved with compassion, said that he ought to use a little discretion and prudence in walking so much at such an hour, for that otherwise he would be taken ill; upon which the holy youth replied, with a smile, "Dear brother, let us leave the question of prudence to him whose duty it is to command me; as for me, I have nothing to do but to obey.

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"It is a mark of an imperfect heart and a very infirm will to discuss too studiously the injunctions of superiors, to hesitate at each particle that is enjoined, to inquire into its reason, and to judge harshly of every order of which the motive is concealed; never to obey willingly, unless when the thing commanded is to our liking, or when we cannot do otherwise, or when clear reason or undoubted authority has proved that it is expedient. Such an obedience is too nice, it is absolutely troublesome."—*St. Bernard.*

"Blind obedience has three properties; in the first place it never considers the countenance of the superior, but his authority; in the second place, it never pries into the reasons and motives which may have induced a superior to give such and such a command, but remains satisfied that the command has been given; and thirdly, it does not inquire about the means by which the command is to be executed, but rests assured that God, by whose inspiration the command has been given, will Himself supply the means for its accomplishment. Instead, therefore, of asking whether the execution of the order is practicable, it proceeds to the execution. Religious obedience, which ought to be blind, engages us to perform with cheerfulness whatever is enjoined, and that with all simplicity, without considering whether the command be reasonable or not, provided that he who gives it be invested with authority; and the command tends to unite the mind to God, for the truly obedient spirit never does anything but with this view."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint, to show the great excellence and merit of blind obedience, brings several passages from Scripture. The first is that of the patriarch Abraham. God, says he, calls this holy patriarch, and tells him: Abraham go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, that is from thy city, and go to the place which I shall show thee. Abraham goes without reply. Could he not have said, Alas, Lord, thou tellest me to go

out of the city; tell me, then, if Thou pleasest, to what place I am to repair. He said not a word, but went whither the spirit led him, without considering whether he went the right or the left—without examining the intention of God in the command, which was so short that even his road was not pointed out. Oh, truly, the obedient man does not stay to make speeches; he proceeds to work without any concern but to obey. When our Lord restored sight to the man born blind, He mixed up clay and put it on his eyes, directing him to go and wash in the fountain of Siloe. Might not this poor man have been reasonably surprised at the means employed by our Lord to cure his blindness, and have said, Alas! what art thou doing? If I were not blind, thy remedy would be sufficient to destroy my sight. But he did not indulge in these considerations; he obeyed with all simplicity. Thus the obedient man believes himself capable of doing all that is enjoined, because he considers that what is commanded comes from God. Naaman, the Syrian, being afflicted with leprosy, when all the remedies he had employed for his recovery had been ineffectual, applied to Eliseus to be healed. Eliseus, without leaving his apartment, despatched his servant, telling Naaman to wash himself seven times in the Jordan, promising that upon this he should be restored to health; but, on receiving this message, Naaman was angry, and said, "Are there no waters in our country equal to those of the Jordan?" and so departed; his attendants, however, showed him that he ought to submit to the prophet's injunction, especially as it was so easy. He yielded to their remonstrances, and, having bathed seven times,

according to the direction of the prophet, he was restored to health; thus Naaman, by putting his reason in the place of obedience, exposed himself to the danger of not recovering the benefit of health.

The saints make use of several comparisons to show with what perfection we ought to obey our superiors. The first is proposed by the Abbot Nesteron, in the following words: "He who would become a devout religious should determine to be, as it were, the beast of burden to the house. Such an one must reflect, that a beast of burden does not choose for itself what it is to do, nor what it shall carry, nor by what street it shall go, but yields to whatever is required. It goes on, stops, turns, returns, suffers, works day and night, at any and all hours, and carries any load whatever that its masters put on its back, without asking questions, making complaints, or starting objections. We are told, in the lives of the ancient fathers, that this holy abbot exemplified his own maxim throughout his whole conduct from his first entrance into religion, saying frequently, "*Ego et asinus unum sumus*"—I will make myself the drudge of the monastery; and so he turned out a very holy religious.

Just such another was the venerable John Berchmans; for, whatever he was ordered to do, he never refused or excused himself, nor gave any sign of displeasure, or made any difficulty, but took all things cheerfully, and executed whatever was intrusted to him with promptness and fidelity, so that, when superiors had any difficult occupation, or had no one at hand for any pressing business, they had recourse to him. Thus it often happened he had no sooner returned to the house

with one person than they sent him out again with another; hence he was sometimes sent away from his own occupations three or four times a day; and when he went out, he left himself entirely to his companions, going, turning, making a circuit, and stopping where and as long as they pleased, without ever objecting or complaining of the loss of time, and he never said that more was put upon him than upon others, for his only desire was to obey and serve his superiors and brothers, in whom he sought to serve and obey our blessed Lord.

But, perhaps, there never was a brighter example of this humble obedience than St. Felix the Capuchin, who not only conceived this lowly estimation of himself, but endeavoured to persuade others to entertain it of him, and to treat him as the drudge of the monastery; thus, when it fell to his lot to bring provisions to the house, which it is the custom amongst the Capuchins to collect as alms from the families around their convent, he used to say, as he went along the streets laden with bread and other gifts, "Let the poor ass of the Capuchins pass, if you please." And if any one replied, "Where is the ass?" he would add, "Do you not know that I am their ass?" One day, as he was walking through the city, with his provision basket on his back, he fell accidentally into the mud, and, not being able to lift himself up, he said to his companion who helped him, "Woe is me that I should fare better than the dumb beast, who is beaten when he falls, whereas I am kindly helped upon my legs again!" And when any of the religious called him by his name, he used to reply, "Why do not you call me brother ass;" and, in fact, he was in deed

what he was in word, for his superiors found him always tractable, always ready to fulfil their injunctions, whatever they were, without any signs of repugnance.

St. Basil makes use of the following comparison. As a workman, says he, who is employed in a building, uses all the instruments of his art as he pleases, and never finds any of them disobedient to his hand or resisting the motions he gives, so a religious ought to be in the hands of a superior a useful instrument, which he may use as he pleases in the spiritual building; he is never to make resistance, but to do what is appointed him. Moreover, as the instrument does not choose its employment, so the religious ought never to select any office, but leave that, and himself also, totally to the care of his superior.

St. Ignatius, to illustrate the same subject, adduces the comparison of a little crucifix, which is turned about at the will of him who holds it; of a staff in the hands of an old man, who makes use of it as it may assist him most, or best pleases him; and of a dead body, which can be turned on every side, and bears all manner of usage without remonstrance. He who lives under obedience, says he, must leave himself to the direction of Divine Providence, made known to him by means of his lawful superior, and he must give himself up completely to it, as if he were a dead person. Now a dead man neither sees nor hears, nor replies, nor complains, nor shows any disposition for one thing more than another, but is carried and turned howsoever and where others please. Observe how far your obedience partakes of such a character as this.

In the lives of the holy fathers it is related that

a young man, having once addressed himself to St. Marinus the elder, desiring to learn of him the practice of religious obedience, he sent him to a place where there were a great many dead bodies, and bid him treat them with reviling, scornful language, and other such like affronts and injuries, and even to pelt them with stones, to try if he could provoke them to passion. Having done as he was ordered, and having returned, the saint asked him how the dead had received all these outrages, and what they had said? he answered that they had said nothing. On the following day he sent him again, and bid him treat them with honour, with fine speeches and commendations, and then see how they would behave; and, as they still remained equally insensible, the saint told him, that, if he would be a perfect religious man, he must follow their example, and neither suffer himself to be provoked to anger or resentment by ill-treatment, nor be puffed up by the esteem or praises of men, but always to have his eye on Jesus Christ, and seek to please Him alone.

NINETEENTH DAY.

"Take care not to examine or judge the orders of superiors; do not ask why they have commanded such and such a thing, or whether it would not have been better to have done it some other way; for this is not the business of a subject, but of a superior."—*St. Jerome.*

"True religious obedience consists in having no self-will, in not permitting ourselves to have any desire which is not entirely subjected to obedience, in being always ready to give up our own lights and inclinations in deference to the inclinations and lights of superiors."—*The Venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque.*

The children of this world, who know little or nothing of the great excellence and merit of Christian humility and self-abnegation, cannot bear the idea of a perfect and blind obedience; but what to them appears to be a great folly, is consummate wisdom in the judgment of the children of light. A wise and distinguished superior of a religious institute, in a letter addressed to his brethren, thus writes on the great value of blind obedience, and on the means of attaining it: "An intimate knowledge of the exceeding excellency of that blind obedience which is paid to superiors for the love of Jesus Christ, is a thing altogether divine, and only to be attained by those to whom the Holy Spirit communicates this supernatural wisdom. Therefore I would exhort you, my dear brethren, to pray with the most intense earnestness for this heavenly illumination, annihilating yourselves before the throne of the majesty of God, and beseeching Him most fervently to make you understand the lessons which His Son, our cruci-

fied Lord Jesus Christ, has given us from the bloody altar of the cross.

"An intense love of our Lord Jesus Christ would lead us to understand and possess this treasure of blind obedience, for this burning love would make us understand the wonderful teaching and example which He left us regarding it; an example and a teaching which none can comprehend but they who love Him devoutly, and which, on the other hand, has ever been and ever shall be, '*Gentibus stultitia*'—'Unto the Gentiles foolishness.'

"Another way by which to attain and to comprehend the preciousness of this virtue of blind obedience, for which the spiritual man is ready at all times even to die, is a firm and lively faith in the authority of Holy Church as the pillar and ground of the truth, and in the examples of the saints whom the Church has canonised; for he who has this lively faith in the spirit and teaching of the Holy Church, his mother, will be most fully persuaded, without any further reasoning, that blind obedience is an act of most exquisite virtue, and of the highest merit before God. Holy Church most undoubtedly has ever taught this truth, in all ages and in all places, and glorified the heroes of obedience; and, therefore, he who believes the wisdom of the saints to be the true wisdom, will not doubt that the blind obedience which they all, without exception, practise, is right, reasonable, and most holy; or, if a doubt of it should cross his mind, he will condemn his own blindness and folly, and prostrate himself in silence before the wisdom of the saints, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking by them, and well understanding the force of those words

of Christ, '*Qui vos audit me audit*'—'He who hears you hears me.'

"These words of our Divine Master are a firm foundation for blind obedience; for they were spoken by Christ to the Church in the persons of His apostles, and the Church speaks and acts by her ministers, and chiefly by the superiors of holy congregations and religious orders; so that there is the same reason for obeying superiors blindly as for blindly believing Christ. The man who believes Christ blindly renounces indeed all inferior reasons, but it is only to attach himself to the highest and only true reason. Thus, also, the man who obeys blindly his superiors renounces indeed, in one sense, his own individual reason, and gives up his own private judgment, but, at the same time, he is, in another sense, following his own reason, because the reason of him who obeys, being illuminated by the grace of God, convinces the truly obedient man that it is most reasonable he should obey his superiors without seeking any other reason than the simple excellence of obedience.

"Observe here, then, my dear brethren, the error of those who say that there are only two authorities which can command us—our own reason or the external superior; for they thus leave out the principal authority, which is God Himself, Who speaks by means of the superior, an authority far more to be trusted than our own individual reason, which is liable to be deceived, and does, in fact, deceive itself whenever it refuses to obey blindly the Divine Will, manifested by the mouth of the religious superior, who is God's minister and representative upon earth. I say that our individual reason always deceives us

when it persuades us not to obey. For when do we deceive ourselves? when, instead of seeking after that which is best adapted for our true end, that is, for the acquisition of virtue, of perfection, of humility, of self-abnegation, of mortification, of penance—in one word, of conformity to Jesus Christ crucified, we stop short at some human consideration, at something altogether of another order from that of the evangelical virtues; for instance, if, when that celebrated hermit and great teacher of perfection commanded his disciple to bring daily a quantity of water, in order to revive a plant which had long been dried up from the root, that disciple had disobeyed, on pretext of following his reason, he would have deceived himself and acted wholly against reason, for though it was indeed true that the act commanded him—to water that plant—was useless and unreasonable, considered only in reference to the end of reviving the plant, yet, if we take into consideration the other more exalted end, which consisted in calling forth the act of humility, self-abnegation, mortification—in one word, of obedience (for all these virtues are contained in obedience), we see clearly that obedience to that unreasonable command was a most reasonable, most wise, and most holy action. So holy, so acceptable to God, is this blind obedience, that He not unfrequently testifies His approbation of it by miracle, and so it was in the very case of which I am speaking, for, as the history tells us, the withered plant revived and flowered again, under the hand of the obedient disciple; and now who does not see, that in every act of obedience paid, for the love of God, to our superior, there is always included abasement, and abnegation of

self, and humility; and that these virtues are in greater perfection in proportion as the thing commanded is more repugnant to our natural sense and judgment? And if Jesus Christ has taught us that our perfection consists in this annihilation of self, for His love and after His example, is it not plain that there is always reason in obeying every command whatsoever, and that this reason is the more sacred the more unreasonable the command appears, and that this reason is the highest of all reasons—a reason to which all other reasons must give way, because the motive of making ourselves perfect, by annihilating ourselves for the love of Jesus Christ, is so great a reason that there is not, nor can be, any greater? It is the sun of reasons, which exceeds all the stars; for what greater reason can there be for an action than to attain the end for which we were created, and to attain it in that most perfect way which Christ Himself has taught us?

"Blind obedience is then a most enlightened obedience; and, by it, we renounce all vain and frivolous reasons, to follow the one only true, solid, and most blessed reason. Yet by whom can all this be understood but by him who loves Jesus Christ? By whom can it be felt but by the simple and humble of heart? On whom does such light shine but on the poor in spirit, on the little child, whose eye is single and pure? '*Gratias tibi ago Pater quia abscondisti hæc a sapientibus et prudentibus et revelasti ea parvulis.*' Therefore, that we may attain to the understanding of these treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God, let us prostrate ourselves before the throne of His Majesty, and, with our mouth in

the dust, pray to the Father that He would draw us to Christ our Lord, for undoubtedly that must be true which the oracle of Divine truth has spoken, '*Nemo ad me veniet nisi Pater traxerit eum.*' If the Father, hearing this prayer rising from the depth of our hearts, in the name of His beloved and only begotten Son, shall open the eyes of our mind, and free them from the cataract which our passions have spread over them, then we shall not only see the intrinsic and inestimable worth of the evangelical virtue of blind obedience, but we shall see also what would have been the fate of our poor bark if it had had no better pilot than ourselves and our miserable wills and reason. We shall see that the light of our own unaided reason would have only served to show us the hopeless state into which we had thrown ourselves. We shall see that the only star by which we can safely steer, is not poor weak human reason, but the one only light which is ever bright, changeless, and benignant—the Will of God; and that the pilot who can steer us most closely by this auspicious star is the superior actually given us by the mercy and providence of God in that religious order, whatever it be, in which we are; for, whatever he may be (unless he command us to sin), he is always the ambassador of God, the interpreter of the Divine Will, and the minister of the Divine mercy.

"If we are visited by the light of Christ's lovely wisdom we shall see this to be true with respect to ourselves, but we shall see it much more with regard to the good which might be done by us to our neighbour or for God's holy Church; because it is God, the Father of all men, who cares for all, and it is Jesus Christ, the Head of the

Church, which He purchased for Himself with the price of His own blood, who cares for His Church; and God the Father, and Jesus Christ His Son, do not choose any to work, for the Divine glory and the good of the Church, but such as, conforming themselves to the example of Christ, crucify themselves, and die to self by virtue of holy obedience, self-denial, humility, and love of the cross.

"It is the follower of holy evangelical obedience alone who truly and completely offers himself to Christ and the Father; and he alone, as I have said, is raised by Them, according to Their good pleasure, to minister to Them in all those great works to which from eternity They have predestinated him. Let us, then, cling more and more to holy obedience, renouncing self once for all; and let us strive after so perfect a grace with the assiduity of humble and uninterrupted prayer. Amen."

TWENTIETH DAY.

"It is imperative on every one who wishes to advance in perfection to impress on her heart the truth, that her superior stands to her in the place of God, and that whatever God wills her to do He ordains through the superior's mouth."—*St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi.*

"See God in your superiors; so shall you learn to revere their wills and follow their commands. Be well assured that obedience is the safest guide and most faithful interpreter of the Divine Will. Pour out your hearts to them as freely as water, mindful that they are charged with the direction of your souls. Keep back nothing, lest the devil, who works in secret, overcome you by his art. Above all, do not be your own master, relying on your own prudence, contrary to the caution of the wise man."—*St. Ignatius.*

THERE is nothing which aids more to acquire the perfection of obedience than to behold God in our superiors, and to consider that it is God who commands us, and that we obey Him, not man. Should Jesus Christ Himself appear, and in His own person lay a command upon us, how readily, how submissively, and with what satisfaction, should we obey Him? We should not weigh nor examine His orders, nor have the least doubt of their equity, but blindly execute them, because it was God that commanded, God that would have us do it, and, therefore, the best thing we could possibly do—for the best thing is to obey Him. We should think ourselves happy to be employed thus directly by Almighty God, and the command most difficult to be executed would be deemed the greatest favour. Now, let us look upon our superiors as the true representatives of God, and we shall find it easy readily to obey their commands. St. Basil

lays down the same truth in this rule: "Do not think," says he, "that I presume of myself to make this comparison; no, I take it from our holy faith and the authority of Christ Himself, Who says, he that hears you, hears Me, that is, he that obeys you, obeys Me. All the holy fathers gave the same interpretation to these words, and say, that they are to be understood not only of the apostles, but of all superiors and spiritual directors; and this doctrine was so generally received amongst the ancient fathers of the desert, that they generally looked upon the command of their superior as the command of God Himself. They did not, in the person of their superior, regard man, but God, whose place he held."

St. Ignatius was most diligent in following this rule, which he strictly urged upon his subjects: "I ought," says he, "not to look on him who gives the order, whether he be the chief, or the deputy, or an underling, but on God above, in Whose place he stands; without this, the merit of obedience is lessened. I ought not to be my own, but His who created me, and His by whose means He governs me; yielding myself up to be moulded in his hands like soft wax, whether it be in writing or receiving letters, in conversing with this person or that, or any other such like thing, placing all my devotion in performing well whatever is required of me."

The venerable Anchieta always looked upon his superiors as the representatives of God; and those rules which related to them were of such importance in his sight that he was as exact in them as he was in those duties which referred immediately to Almighty God. This impression inspired him with a filial veneration for their per-

sons and character, which made him sometimes say, there would be little merit in his obedience, if the merit of obedience consisted only in the pain of receiving, or in the difficulty of accomplishing the orders given; that his duty, in this respect, had always been conformable to his inclination; that, from the moment he became a religious, he had always regarded as fathers those whom Providence had assigned him for masters; and that, consequently, he had never felt the least objection to them, nor any difficulty in submitting to their will.

The venerable Father Pinamonti, in obeying, never examined the thing which was commanded, nor the person by whom the command was given; but in the order and person of every superior he recognised the voice and person of God. He showed this by the submission and reverence which he observed in speaking to, and appearing before them, so much so that many of them were ashamed to see a man of such merit and eminence so humble and lowly in their presence. But still more clearly did he show it by the pains he took to promote in others reverence and respect for the persons and commands of superiors; hence, whenever he heard any one break out into complaints against the superior, or his manner of government, he immediately exerted himself in his defence, and discovered more arguments in his favour than if he had been upholding his own cause; by this means showing how well he united the prudence of the serpent with the simplicity of the dove. The prudence of the serpent he used in combating, with sagacity and talent, the opposition made to the persons and government of superiors; and the simplicity of the dove he

exemplified in the docility with which he subjected his own understanding to whatever was commanded by any superior.

The blessed Peter Claver obeyed not only his superiors, but all the officers of the house, in whatever regarded their offices, as God Himself. If he went to help in the kitchen, he took off his cap, and, with downcast eyes, humbly inquired of the cook what he wished him to do. When desired to prepare the refectory, he would not do the least thing without the order of the brother who had the charge of it. At the first signal from the porter, he ran to him, saying, "What are your orders, brother?" The sacristan, sure of always finding him ready, applied to him for everything requiring the ministry of a priest. When he went out into the town he had no other will than that of his companion, who decided as he pleased which road they should take and how they should go. If he entered the novices' quarters, he asked the commands of the one who presided, and for the time respected him as his superior.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"Beware, thou never consider the qualities, the ideas, or the actions of thy superior, else wilt thou exchange Divine obedience for human; being urged to obey rather for what thou sensibly beholdest in him, than for the sake of God, Who is invisibly represented in his person. Oh! how great is the desolation that the devil effects in the hearts of religious, when once he induces them to judge the manners of superiors."—*St. John of the Cross.*

"St. Paul commands us to obey all superiors, even those who are bad. Our Blessed Saviour, His Virgin Mother, and St. Joseph, have taught us this kind of obedience in the journey they took from Nazareth to Bethlehem, when Cæsar published an edict that all his subjects should repair to the place of their nativity, to be enrolled. They complied with this order with the most affectionate obedience, though the emperor was a pagan and an idolator, so desirous was our Lord of showing us that we should never regard the persons of those who command, provided they be invested with sufficient authority."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Francis of Assisium had truly attained this perfection when he said, that, amongst many other favours, he had received this from the hands of God, he could as easily and readily obey the last novice in the monastery, that should be appointed his guardian, as any religious, however full of years, experience, and wisdom.

St. Francis Borgia treated with singular veneration all superiors, not only when they were actually in office, but afterwards; and St. Ignatius, having appointed a certain lay brother to take care of his health, he observed towards him the same obedience he would have shown to the saint himself.

The venerable youth, John Berchmans, used to consider God in the person of his superiors, and

never looked at their qualities, and, therefore, always treated them all with great veneration; and he used to say that he had never felt the least aversion for any one of them, nor had ever entertained a thought against their persons, their orders, or their judgments.

"Alas!" exclaims St. Francis of Sales, "if we expected to find perfect superiors only, we should have to pray to God to send us saints and angels, for, as for men, we should find none such amongst them. We seek, indeed, such as shall not give us a bad example; but we do not expect them to be without imperfections if they have those qualifications of mind which are necessary for the office, and the more so because many might be found more perfect, who, for all that, would not be fit to be superiors; and tell me, did not our Lord Himself show us that we need not expect this, by the choice He made of St. Peter to be superior of the apostles? Every one knows the fault which he committed in denying our most dear Lord; but, besides this, after having been confirmed in grace by receiving the Holy Ghost, did he not commit yet another fault, which was judged of such importance that St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, declares that he resisted him to the face, because he was to be blamed?

And not only was St. Peter faulty, St. Paul and St. Barnabas, too, had a dispute, because St. Barnabas wished to take John Mark, who was his cousin, as their companion, whom St. Paul did not judge fit for that purpose; and, as St. Barnabas would not yield to St. Paul, they separated upon this dispute, and went to preach, St. Paul in one country and St. Barnabas, with his cousin John Mark, in another; also, it is true, that our Lord drew good

out of their dispute, for, instead of preaching in one place only, they thus scattered the seed of the Gospel more widely. Do not, then, suppose that so long as we are in this life, we can live without committing imperfections, for that cannot be, whether in superiors or inferiors, since we are all men, and, consequently, all imperfect, and, indeed, subject to every kind of imperfection.

Our Lord has commanded us to say, every day, these words: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us; and there is no exception to this commandment, because we have all need to make the prayer. It is, therefore, no sound reasoning to say, such a person is a superior, therefore he should never be angry, or subject to other imperfections. You are surprised, that, having had occasion to speak to the superioress, she spoke to you less sweetly than usual, because, perhaps, at the moment, she had her head full of anxiety and business. It is your self-love that is thus all at once disturbed, and you judge her, instead of thinking with yourself that God permitted this little dryness of the superioress to mortify your self-love, which wanted her to caress you, and receive graciously what you had to say. But, you say, it annoys us to find mortification where we did not look for it. Alas, you should, for that reason, go and pray God for the superioress, and bless her for this profitable contradiction.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, in a letter addressed to the members of his congregation, speaks thus: "I again recommend to you, obedience to whoever may be the superior of a house, and even to him whose functions for the moment give him a right to command, though he be the last brother

of the congregation. It is on such occasions we see who is truly obedent. I am not edified so much by the obedience given to me, as by that shown to a rector, to a prefect, to a father, minister, or to the least of those whose office invests them with any pre-eminence over others. I trust in the goodness of God, that certain neglects of such obedience, which have given me much pain, may not occur again. Obedience is the only thing which can preserve the congregation, since it is that which inspires fervour; but obedience, I repeat, towards whoever holds the place of superior, otherwise it is not done for the congregation. Every fault can be easily pardoned, except that of disobedience.

It is not a subject of commendation, he often said, that I am obeyed, but I wish an equal submission to be shown to whoever presides over any exercise; for, whatever may be his personal merits, he holds the office of superior. If this is not attended to, mischief must follow, and we shall see nothing but disorder and confusion.

We read that St. Gertrude lived under an abbess, whose life was truly exemplary, but whose temper was disagreeable. One day, as the saint was praying for the improvement of the abbess's temper, our Saviour spoke thus to her: Why do you ask that she should be freed from an imperfection which gives her such frequent occasions of humiliation in My sight? What merit would you have in obeying, if she were of a sweet temper? I permit this imperfection in your superior, for the exercise and improvement of your obedience and for her own merit.

Blosius, also, relates another revelation to the same St. Gertrude very like this. One day, says

he, she offered up her prayers for a certain superior of a congregation, and begged earnestly of God that He would be pleased to free him from a fault to which he was very subject. Whilst she was at her prayers our Saviour appeared to her, and said, "The same excess of goodness and mercy that moved Me to institute that congregation causes me to permit imperfections in those that govern it, thereby to increase the merit of their subjects, for there is more virtue in submitting to the orders of a person whose faults we know than to one whose faults we know not. When I permit superiors to have their failings, and to forget themselves sometimes, by reason of temporal affairs, which they must be employed in, it is that they may thence take occasion to humble themselves the more, and that subjects may increase in virtue by the defects of their superiors; even so the faults, as well as the virtues, of inferiors, may serve sometimes to augment the merits of superiors." These words filled her with admiration at God's infinite goodness and wisdom, which disposes all things for the benefit of His servants, and makes even those defects He permits serve to render them more perfect.

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"If thou art not indifferent who is thy superior, thou needest not hope to become a truly spiritual man or a faithful observer of thy vows."—*St. John of the Cross.*

"The excellence of obedience consisteth not in following the will of a mild and gentle superior, who commands rather by entreaties than with authority, but in subjecting oneself to the yoke of one who is imperious, rigorous, severe, ill-tempered, and never satisfied. To do this is to draw clear water from the mouth of a brazen lion."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THE holy Mother St. Jane Francis of Chantal used to say, that she felt greater satisfaction in obeying the meanest sister in the convent, who did nothing but contradict her and command her in a rough and harsh manner, than one who might be the most experienced and considerate of the whole order; for, as she added, the less we consider the creature, the more secure are we of finding our Creator.

St. Athanasius, in the life of St. Anthony, says, that the ancient hermits, who consecrated themselves particularly to obedience, ordinarily sought for harsh superiors, who would treat them rudely, and never show approbation of anything they did; and the more disagreeable the superior's temper was, the more readily they obeyed him. The ordinary custom observed in those days amongst them was, that two solitaries should put themselves under the conduct and government of an ancient father, as his scholars, and serve him in everything as a servant does his master; so that the ancients had the same authority over their disciples, to correct and chastise

them, when they failed in the most trifling affair, that a master has to correct and chastise his servant when he fails to obey his commands; nay, they more frequently treated their disciples very harshly, either out of natural severity or to exercise their patience, as St. Pachomius did towards his disciple Theodosius, to cure him of vain glory.

The holy Abbot Moses suggests this means for the attainment of perfection. Place yourself under the discipline of an austere and severe man, who will treat you harshly and rigorously, and then make it your study to drink in, as it were, all his reproofs and ill-treatment, just as if you were drinking milk and honey; and I assure you that in a very short time you will find yourself on the very summit of the mountain of perfection.

The Abbot John of Thebes, as we read in the lives of the Fathers of the Desert, served with great diligence and affection for twelve years one of the old fathers, who was sick; and, although the father saw how much fatigue he endured, he never said one kind or affectionate word to him, but always treated him with roughness. When, however, he came to the point of death, he called the good abbot to him, in the presence of the assembled fathers, and taking him by the hand, said three times, "Abide with God;" then, recommending him to the fathers of the monastery, he said, "He is not a man, but an angel."

St. Catherine of Bologna desired her superior always to treat her with asperity, and to impose the most arduous tasks upon her, for she used to say she had found, from her own experience, that to obey in agreeable and easy things is profitable, but to obey when the superior imposes an un-

pleasant task and commands with a severe look, in a little time fills the soul with virtue and unites it to God.

Of St. John of the Cross it is said that he lived by his own choice in a monastery, the superior of which held his virtue as doubtful, and mortified him in every way.

To avoid, however, all danger of mistake, we must always distinguish between the inferior and the superior part of our soul, which is also called our rational will. Unquestionably, says St. Francis of Sales, I should feel more satisfaction in the inferior part of my soul in doing what I am enjoined by a superior, for whom I have a natural inclination, than in obeying the directions of another, for whom I have not; but, if guided by the superior part of my soul, I render as exact obedience to the superior who is disagreeable to me, it is sufficient, and my obedience becomes more estimable when I feel less pleasure in the performance; under such circumstances, we give a clear proof that our obedience originates in the love of God, and not in our own gratification. There is nothing more common in the world than this ready obedience towards those we love; but it is extremely rare, and is practised only in religious institutes, towards those whom we do not love.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"A fervent religious bears and takes all things well that are commanded him. A negligent and lukewarm religious has trouble upon trouble, and on every side suffers anguish, because he has no comfort within, and is hindered from seeking any without."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"He who is truly obedient makes no distinction between one thing and another, nor does he desire one employment more than another, for the only end he has in view is the faithful accomplishment of what he is ordered to do."—*St. Bernard.*

St. Jerome relates, that when he visited the holy monks of the desert, he became acquainted with one, who, for the space of eight years, had carried on his shoulders, twice a day, a large heavy stone, the distance of three miles each time; and this he did by the command of his superior. The saint asked him, whether he did not feel great reluctance in performing so painful a task: "No," replied the monk; "this humble practice has given me as much peace and content of soul as if I had been engaged in the most sublime and important occupation in the world." St. Jerome concludes his account with the observation, that those who resemble this devout monk, make great progress in the spiritual life, and advance in perfection; for they are nourished with solid and substantial food, that is, with the performance of the will of God; and he says, he was so struck with this reply, that from that moment it produced in him a notable change of life.

St. Ignatius says, that we must always be ready to execute our superior's orders, though

ever so difficult and repugnant to nature. This he calls the proof of prompt obedience; for, as other saints observe, true obedience is best known in difficult commands. When the thing commanded pleases us, obedience is not so easily discerned, for secondary motives may induce our compliance, rather than a real submission to the will of God; but when the command is harsh and very repugnant to our inclinations, and we zealously embrace it, there is no doubt but that our motive is good, since we are assured we do not seek ourselves, nor our own satisfaction in it, nor propose to ourselves any object but God and the fulfilment of His will.

The venerable Father Da Ponte, deeply convinced of this truth, signalized himself in its practice like a true follower of Jesus Christ, Who lived and died by obedience, showing himself ready, on many occasions, to lose his life, rather than deviate in the least point from obedience. At Villa Garcia, when he was appointed to the important offices of Master of Novices, Rector, and Instructor of the young fathers going through their third year of probation, his delicate constitution soon felt the effects of such multiplied engagements, and threatened to sink him beneath the burden; but when exhorted to apply to superiors for some partial relief, he replied: "No, indeed; never could I do such a thing; obedience has placed me here, and here will I remain, even if it cost me my life. Superiors hold the place of God, and know better than I do what suits me. Let death come, I can desire no better death than that of obedience, seeing that Jesus Christ has set me the example. "He was made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

These sentiments encouraged him to remain firm at Salamanca, on two several occasions, although he knew by experience how injurious the climate was to his health. He said: "It is not necessary that I should live, but it is very necessary that I should obey, if I wish to be a good religious. The Lord governs me:" relying on these words, he waited till his superiors, of their own accord, ordered him elsewhere for the sake of his health. That he might not lose the merit of this virtue, even in the least things, he would go and ask the most trifling permissions of superiors. When the companion who had charge of his health advised him to spare himself this inconvenience, on account of the general permission he had, he answered: "Oh! brother, let me perform these acts of submission to my superior, who holds the place of God in my regard. With this subjection, I may hope to become more pleasing to His divine Majesty, and render my actions more meritorious to myself."

He practised this subordination and dependence, not only towards superiors, but even to the lowest subordinate official in the house. When humility led him to assist the infirmarian, or the cook, or any other, he obeyed them with the utmost punctuality and exactness, in whatever concerned their offices. And because higher superiors, for the sake of his health, had subjected him to one of the brothers, he looked upon him as his master, and followed his orders with such humility and promptitude, that the brother was confounded as well as edified.

The blessed Leonard acted in a similar way. He lived in a holy indifference to everything earthly, and with a fixed determination to fulfil

in all things the will of God, by the practice of perfect obedience; and he thus wrote on the subject: "The only thing to which we ought to give our thoughts, is to follow in all things the holy will of God, made known to us by superiors and spiritual fathers." Whatever he was desired to do, however difficult, such as to interrupt his missionary labours when he was reaping great fruits from them, or to take a long journey by sea or land, or to leave the solitude to which he had retired, to give, as he said, a mission to himself—immediately, without saying a word, he left all, and went about the work he was enjoined. So hearty was his desire to obey, that whenever he was about to undertake any work, he tried to assure himself of the will of his superior, feeling certain that that would be the will of God, and well pleasing to Him. And as conformity to the divine will is more meritorious when accompanied by holy dispositions, blessed Leonard made it his study, not only to surrender his will to that of God, but to believe, that whatever God appointed for him, conduced most to His greater glory, and was most profitable for his own salvation. For this reason he was constantly repeating this ejaculation: "May Thy most perfect and holy will be done in me, and by me, henceforth and for ever. Amen."

A great means for practising obedience in difficult and grievous matters, is diligence in fulfilling it in easy and little things: "A man," says St. Philip, "should endeavour to be obedient in the smallest things which appear of little moment, because by doing so he will render the practice of obedience in great matters easy." The venerable Joseph Anchieta recommended the same

thing. He used to say, that we ought to obey in the smallest thing, and that doing so, served as a preparation for the obedience to be practised in the greatest; that we cannot better show our respect to superiors, than by executing their orders most faithfully, even though they be of the least importance. He was a stranger to those inconvenient interpretations that self-love sometimes suggests, in order to avoid the strict obedience to the letter; he always confined himself to the terms prescribed, preferring that men should accuse him of want of prudence, rather than give our divine Lord the least reason to reproach him for a want of submission. On one occasion, being sent to the door by his superior, to receive a stranger who had asked for him, a second visitor arrived during the time that he was speaking to the first; upon which, he begged the new comer to allow him to go and ask permission, before he could begin to converse with him. He acted in the same manner on numberless other occasions; and he did it with so much sweetness and modesty, that no one could ever be offended at it.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"Obedience consists not only in performing actually that which is ordered, but also in a continual disposition to do all that can be imposed upon us on any occasion whatsoever."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

"He that either openly or covertly endeavours to influence his superior to command him what he himself wishes, is much deceived if he pretend to have any merit from such obedience; for, in this case, he does not obey his superior, but his superior rather obeys him."—*St. Bernard.*

This saint, speaking of St. Paul's conversion, observes, that the first thing St. Paul did or said, after the light from heaven had shone upon his soul, was to ask to know God's pleasure, in these words: "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" This was a sign, says St. Bernard, of a true conversion, and an argument that he had for ever renounced this world, and was fully determined to follow Jesus Christ, by desiring to know what God would have him do. A short sentence, but very comprehensive, pithy, expressive, full of energy, and worthy of all commendation! How few are there now-a-days who aspire to this perfection in obedience! How few are to be found now, who, entirely renouncing their own will, wish never to do anything for the future of their own accord, and only desire, with St. Paul, that God's will may be accomplished in them, saying, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me do?" or, with the prophet: "My heart is ready; O God, my heart is ready," to do all that Thou art pleased to command me.

St. Ignatius laid down the following rule for

himself: I must not request nor pray the superior to send me to such a place, or appoint me to such an office. It is permitted me to acquaint him with my inclinations and desires, but with an entire abandonment of myself to him, and with a disposition to approve of whatever he may determine. When this saint heard Father Laynez saying, that since he could not go to the Holy Land, he felt a wish to go and carry the light to the dark nations of India, he said: "And if I felt any such desire rising in my mind, I would root it out." And when Laynez seemed to think it strange, he added: "Are we not bound by our vow to go to what countries the pope may appoint? after that, I am equally disposed to go to all countries, and have no preference for the east or the west; so that if I felt my mind drawn towards any particular place, as you do, I would force it in another direction till the balance was even." When he was old and broken in health, he used often to say, that he was ready at a sign from the pope to take his staff, and go on foot into Spain, or to embark in the first vessel he might find at Ostia, without either sails or oars, or rigging, or provisions, and to cross the sea; and this he would do not only quietly, but with joy. A nobleman, who heard him say this, said in astonishment: "But where would be the prudence of such a step?" "Prudence, my lord," he answered, "is a virtue for those who command, not for those who obey."

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi never sought to draw the will of her superiors to her own, but, on the contrary, endeavoured to submit her own will and judgment to theirs, trying first, to think, judge, and feel as the superior thought, judged

and felt, and then obeying with readiness and alacrity, and without expostulation; she used to say, that she never seemed to herself to have obeyed, unless she had first captivated her judgment to regard the order as good, however repugnant it might be to her natural feelings.

St. John Climacus calls obedience the tomb of our will, wherein it lies dead, and from which humility rises; for certainly the very moment we enter into religion, we ought to think that our will dies to ourselves, and that henceforth we ought to live only to that of our superiors. We are, therefore, sadly deluded and deceived, as St. Ignatius remarks, if we think to practise obedience, when we wish to receive only such commands from our superiors as we like ourselves, and endeavour to make them condescend to our will.

A religious superior being asked by his subjects to show to them how to use the spirit of understanding without failing in simple and blind obedience, thus wrote to them: "I answer, that simple and blind obedience is most perfectly compatible and consistent with the spirit of understanding, and that in many ways, as I shall now briefly explain. First: we must consider that the spirit of understanding is the more full and perfect, according as the reasons by which our actions are guided are higher and more universal; for, to act according to the spirit of understanding, means nothing else than to act according to reason, without allowing ourselves to be swayed or disturbed by any passion whatever. Now the highest and most general of all reasons for action, is that of doing always and in everything the will of God; but he who practises obedience with purity and simplicity, is sure

of doing the will of God, who has said of all ecclesiastical superiors: "He that heareth you, heareth me." This is a simple reason, but most efficacious and most sublime, and it contains so much life in itself, as to make all other inferior reasons superfluous, and therefore, obedience is called *blind*, not because it is without light, but because it is so full of it, that all other light becomes needless, just as a man is not in the dark who does not light his candle when the sun shines. Secondly: besides this, he who obeys simply and blindly, may exercise the spirit of understanding in the manner of executing the command given to him. Two persons may execute an order of superiors, but one executes it without attention, without judgment, without sense, and without reflecting well upon what he is commanded to do, nor upon the true intention of him by whom the command was given; he executes it with a bad grace, without a persuasion of its fitness, and almost in contempt. The other executes the same order, seeking first of all to understand well the mind of the superior, then studying the best means of executing it, doing what he has to do heartily, as if it were an affair of his own, desiring to succeed in it, using the necessary circumspection, doing it with a good grace, and, finding contentment in it, as being most certainly pleasing God. This second obeys with simplicity, and at the same time, in the spirit of understanding. He does not obey like a machine, which acts by a spring, but like a living and intelligent person. When a superior gives an order, he cannot prescribe all the things which relate to the manner of obeying, but he gives the command, and leaves the subject to do

it; and the subject who has most of the spirit of understanding, is known at once, by the course he takes to execute what he is commanded to do. Thirdly: it often happens that the command itself is more or less general, and leaves many things to the judgment of him to whom it is given. In such case, the subject must observe what is the sphere marked out to him by the command of the superior, and within that sphere he is obliged, by the same authority, to act for himself; not by caprice, however, but by the rule which he has to guide him, that is, by the spirit of understanding. If you consider the various members of a religious institute, you will see that all, if they have its spirit, act by obedience—even the general himself, who is subject to the pope; but, at the same time, obedience leaves to all a certain ground free, to some more, to some less; the larger liberty to superiors, the less to inferiors. Each may enter this free ground, and there he must exercise this spirit of understanding. Thus, in your house, beginning with the higher superior, and descending through all the other offices of the household, to the very least, you will see that all the offices are subordinate one to the other; and directed by obedience, they may and ought to be exercised in the spirit of understanding; for each official is directed to exercise the spirit of understanding within the sphere of her office, in all that is left to her own discretion. Take into consideration, also, an office of charity towards exterior persons, such as that of mistress, or infirmarian. It is obedience which imposes these offices upon any sister, and, therefore, all the acts performed therein have the merit of obedience; but, nevertheless, how much of the

spirit of understanding is required to fulfil them with perfection! Consider, also, particular commands; you will generally find that there is a latitude allowed, in which the spirit of understanding will find place. If one of you receives an order to write a letter, and the subject of it be even traced out for you, will not much room still be left for the exercise of the understanding in writing that letter with sense and diligence? Obedience, then, does not always determine all personal actions; this would be impossible; but many of these will always remain free, and in them the spirit of understanding may and should have a large field of action. Fourthly: the spirit of understanding may be exercised also in another way, and that is, in making respectful observations to superiors, when, in any command they give, there appears something which calls for consideration.

But to make these respectful observations in the true spirit of understanding, three conditions are required:—First, that they originate in pure zeal, and not from any feeling of self-love. Secondly, that we do not make them lightly, saying everything that comes into our head, or to our tongue, without serious reflection and careful examination of the subject. Thirdly, that they be made in a spirit of submission, so that if the superior persists in his command, the subject should not take it ill, but equally execute it with tranquillity and cheerfulness. Superiors themselves have pleasure in hearing such respectful observations from their subjects, provided all be done in the spirit of humility and charity; but if, after all this, it happen that what must be done or is done from obedience brings some inconvenience,

provided always it be no sin, the person who obeys loses nothing; on the contrary, she gains by it, because this act of obedience includes a mortification of the judgment, which is of all things most pleasing to God. She who, in obeying, mortifies herself by denying her own will, by sacrificing her self-love, and by submitting her reason to a higher reason, that is, to God, from whom the command comes, has made a great advance in the way of perfection.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"There are some who obey, but with so much languor and reluctance as greatly to diminish the merit of their virtue. Charity and obedience have so close a connexion, that they cannot be separated. Love induces us to obey with promptitude; and whatever be the difficulty with which an order may be attended, the person who possesses this amorous obedience undertakes it amorously."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"The truly obedient man does not know what it is to delay and put off the business till to-morrow; he is an enemy to every kind of demur; he prevents the superior, and even gets the start of his commands. His eyes and ears are always open to the least sign that is given him; all his other senses, and every power within him, faithfully waits the motion of his superior. He does what he is bid, goes where he is commanded, and is always ready to receive and execute every order."—*St. Bernard.*

In illustration of this truth, this saint gives the following examples. "The Lord commanded Zacheus, and he immediately obeyed. 'Zacheus,' says the Lord, 'make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house;' and he made haste and came down, and received him with

joy." . . . . "Do you wish," asks the holy doctor, in another place, "to hear an example of perfect obedience? Listen. The Lord saw Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the sea, and said: 'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men;' and without consultation or hesitation, without any solicitude for their life, without considering how they, being so rude and illiterate, could become preachers, without putting any question, without any delay whatsoever, they abandon their nets and ships, and follow Christ. Be mindful, brethren, that these things are written for your instruction; that you may learn true obedience, and to mortify your hearts by the obedience of charity."

We have another remarkable example of the most ready obedience, in the young Samuel while he was waiting upon the high priest Heli in the temple. The Scripture says, that one night, as he slept in the temple, where the ark of God was kept, the Lord called upon him, and he immediately got up and ran to Heli, saying, "You called upon me, here I am." But Heli told him that he did not call him, and bade him go to bed again. He did so, and was no sooner fallen asleep, than the Lord called him again. Up he got, went to Heli, and said, "You called me;" but he answered, "Child, I did not call thee; go and sleep." He obeyed, and God calling him the third time, he got up, and went again to Heli, saying, as he had done before, "You called me; behold, here I am." Upon this Heli understood that it was God who had called upon Samuel, and, therefore, bade him go back and sleep, and, if any one should call him again, to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears." Samuel returned,

and lay down again; and God, appearing to him, called twice upon him, to whom he answered in Heli's words, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears." Upon which God told him that the punishment with which He had threatened Heli should very suddenly be inflicted. Now, let us consider a little Samuel's very exact and ready obedience. Though Heli himself tells him he did not call him, and bade him go to take his rest, yet Samuel never thought of the call of any other person there in the temple than that of the high-priest; three several times, therefore, he got up, and went to know his commands. Such ought to be our obedience towards our superiors. Our minds should always be equally disposed with Samuel's for anything which we think our superior would have us do.

Ecclesiastical history records many striking examples of the same kind. Cassian, speaking of the holy Fathers of the Desert, says, that though they were continually employed, they immediately interrupted their work at the call of obedience. One, says he, wrote books of devotion, another meditated, some translated spiritual books, others were engaged in manual works; but no sooner did they hear the clock strike, or the superior's call, than they ever strove who should be first out of his cell; and their haste was so great, that he who was writing would not allow himself time to finish the letter he had begun.

The Abbot Silvanus loved, with a singular affection, one of his monks, who was named Mark; and having been informed by another monk that the rest were much offended at it, he took him with him to the cells of the different

monks, and called them one by one by their names: they were all slow to answer his call, except Mark, who immediately opened the door; and the abbot entering his cell, with the other monk, they saw that he had been in the act of writing, and yet that, at the call of his superior, he had left off in the middle of a word, in order not to keep him waiting; by this the abbot showed that he had reason to love this monk more than the rest.

When the Magi saw the star which invited them to go in search of the infant Jesus, they immediately said within themselves, "This is the sign of the great king; let us go to adore Him, and offer Him gold, incense, and myrrh." Religious ought to do the same in what regards holy obedience. "I wish," said St. Alphonsus to the members of his congregation, "that you were all anxious for nothing but to keep your eyes on the star which guides you, because, if you turn your eyes away from obedience, you will be bewildered in trouble and confusion. Whoever obeys punctually is sure to do the holy will of God, in which alone true peace is to be found. It is to destroy the influence of these truths, and the effects they produce for our greatest good, that the devil continues to tempt some amongst you to attach little weight to obedience."

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"God loveth a cheerful giver." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"A cheerful countenance and sweet speech greatly adorn the practice of obedience. . . . . For what place can be assigned to obedience when bitter sadness is discernible? External tokens generally manifest the internal will; and it is difficult for him who changes his mind not to change countenance."—*St. Bernard.*

St. Basil proposes to the imitation of religious the example of the apostles, who obeyed their Divine Master even in the most arduous things with great gladness of soul. "The apostles," says he, "bowed down their heads, and bore the yoke of obedience with joy. They went forward with a joyful spirit to meet contumelies, ignominies, stonings, crosses, and the most cruel deaths. Those who are true religious, according to the spirit of the Lord, must render the same obedience to their prelate."

St. Lawrence Justinian places before the eyes of religious, as an excitement to cheerful obedience, the example of courtiers and ministers of earthly kings; and calls upon them to consider with what cheerfulness and joy these endeavour to execute the orders of their sovereigns, and urges them to follow their example. A faithful soldier, when ordered to do anything connected with his profession, feels great joy, and readily obeys; so ought we, when exercised in obedience, which is the badge and characteristic mark of our profession.

(a) 2 Cor. ix. 7.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi was most anxious to see this spirit of cheerful obedience flourish amongst her daughters, wishing them to obey joyfully and with a glad countenance, not as obeying creatures but the blessed God, since they had not given their will to creatures, but to Jesus. She recommended the novices not to do the slightest thing without permission of another novice, whom she named to them, that nothing might be done but in the exercise of obedience. Those who had great repugnance in obeying, by doing violence to themselves in asking permission in the slightest things, accustomed themselves to obey easily in things of obligation. She taught them to obey the superiors given them, even though they were but lay sisters, and to bring their judgments into conformity wherever they rebelled, holding that what was commanded was the will of God. "Till you give yourselves as dead into the hands of obedience," said she, "you cannot truly know what the will of God is. Offer to God your will in sacrifice, and you will find complete content. If you desire to fulfil the divine will, never seek, by persuasion, to bend the will of your superior to your own, but execute her will simply; by this means you will arrive at great perfection. If you feel a repugnance in breaking down your will, you show little love to God, since, in a matter in which you can supremely honour Him, you are unwilling to exert yourself for His love."

Of the blessed Leonard it is written, that, in obeying, he always expressed in his countenance the joy of his soul. He used to say: "In perfect obedience, under all circumstances, I am sure not to go wrong; therefore I rejoice more in an act of

obedience than if I had converted the whole world." As this blessed man lived joyfully in the exercise of holy obedience, so he also died cheerfully in the practice of the same virtue. Having received direction from the sovereign pontiff to return to Rome, he left Bologna on the 15th of November, and set out towards the holy city. As he was taken ill in the road, his friends entreated him to stop in several places, but he insisted on proceeding, in obedience to the pontiff, as he explained to his companion, saying to him, "You know, brother, that his Holiness desired, when I left Rome, that I should return in November; you know that he wrote to me in Barbarola, saying, 'I hope you will soon return to Rome;' and when the Pope says 'I hope,' we must take it as if he said 'I command.' My conscience will be very much troubled, if, in consequence of this illness, I fail in obedience. Let us, then, go on to Rome; and, if I die on the road, it will be an especial favour, granted by my Heavenly Father, which I have long desired—to die in the exercise of obedience." In short, a few hours after he arrived in Rome he departed this life, with the consolation of being obedient unto death.

St. Jane Frances of Chantal gave the following rule to her religious sisters: "We must do everything by love; we must rather love obedience than fear disobedience."

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"Be thou faithful till death, and I will give thee the crown of life." (a)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"A condition of true obedience is perseverance. This our Redeemer taught us in a very particular manner. St. Paul has proclaimed His great example in the following words: 'He was made obedient unto death;' and to carry this obedience to the utmost limits, he adds, 'even to the death of the cross.' In these words, 'unto death,' it is clearly presupposed that He had been obedient during the whole course of His life."

"A religious who should think himself entitled to relax in anything, after his profession, even after he had lived long in religion, would deceive himself. Our Lord manifested more exactness at the period of His death than in His infancy."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint greatly laments the misfortune of those religious who, after practising obedience with great perfection during their novitiate, and in the early years of their profession, lose the relish of this virtue, and become relaxed in its practice. Good God! he exclaims, what is this but to imitate the conduct of a pilot, who having brought his vessel into port, after a long and laborious voyage—and severe efforts to save it from the perils of the boisterous ocean, should, on his arrival, wreck it, and throw himself into the sea? Would not such a man be charged with insanity? for if that was to be the end of all his labours, why did he toil so much to bring it into port? The religious, who has begun well, cannot complete his work without perseverance to the end.

The saints, who are animated by the spirit of

(a) Apoc. ii. 10.

God, act in a far different way. The venerable Joseph Anchieta, in his old age, received leave from the provincial to choose for his residence that place which he liked best; but the man of God, who desired nothing so much as to obey, had a scruple in using this permission, and wrote as follows upon the subject to Father Ignatius Tolosa: "Father provincial has authorized me to choose whatever place I like for my residence, but this liberty is disagreeable to me, because it exposes me to the danger of being deceived, and of straying from the right path, for none of us can tell what really suits him best; and it would be a sad mistake for me, after having for forty-two years left myself entirely at the disposal of superiors, to wish to follow my own will and fancy in my old age."

We read the same thing of the blessed Leonard, who, from the beginning of his religious career in his youth, to its consummation in old age, never relaxed in the least in the practice of holy obedience. It was most edifying to see the old man, venerable on account of his age and great merits, kneeling at the feet of his superior, humbly asking leave to go out of his convent on some work of charity, perfectly indifferent as to who might be his companion on the occasion. He asked leave every time he had to reply to a letter, change his habit, and on every other similar occasion; kissing the ground each time as if he were a novice; every time he passed the cell of the superior, he uncovered his head and stopped, making a profound bow; and if he were asked why he did so, he replied: "This is a sacred place, occupied by my superior, and for that reason, worthy of all reverence, for he stands in the place of

God to me." He never inquired into the reason or cause of any order, and severely reproved those who refused to obey, until they had examined the motive of the superior. He used to say: "It ought to be sufficient that the order given is not offensive to God; in everything but that, it becomes us to bow our head to obedience." But to a man who mentioned to him some doubts he had about obedience, he replied: "Plant in your heart this truth—The superior may err in giving orders, but those under his rule, who desire only to please God, can never err in obeying."

St. Liguori says, that religious who are advanced in years are more strictly bound to perfect observance than those who are young in religion. First, because they have been longer in the cloister; and, as the more time a person has devoted to study, the more extensive should be his learning; so the longer a religious is engaged in the meditation of Jesus crucified, the greater should be his progress in the science of the saints, and in Christian perfection. Secondly, because the example of the aged is most efficacious in inducing the juniors to observe or violate the rule. Religious of long standing are the torches which enlighten the community; they are the pillars that sustain regular observance, and, by their example, they engage the young in support of order: but if discipline be disregarded by the older members of the community, the rule will be despised by the novices. Generally speaking, all the irregularities which creep into religious communities are to be ascribed, not so much to the young as to the old religious, who, by their bad example, lead the others to seek a relaxation of the rigour of the rule. As long as their works

contradict their words, all their exhortations and entreaties to the juniors to observe the rule will be unprofitable: "The eyes," as St. Ambrose says, "persuade sooner than the ears." Example is far more persuasive than precept.

And how is it possible to induce novices to observe the rule, when the conduct of old religious is subversive of regular observance? "Nothing," says Tertullian, "can be built up by what pulls it down." When Eleazar was tempted by the wicked Antiochus to transgress the divine command, which forbade the Jews to eat swine's flesh, his friends, through compassion for his old age, besought him, in order to escape death, at least to pretend to comply with the tyrant's order. But the venerable old man wisely replied: "That he would rather be sent into the other world, for it did not become his old age to dissemble." He would rather sacrifice his life than pretend, at such an advanced age, to break the divine precept, and thus teach his younger countrymen to transgress the law. "The look of a just man," says St. Ambrose, "is an admonition." Oh! what an affecting admonition to novices, and how far superior to the most eloquent exhortation, to see an aged religious exact in the practice of obedience. The zeal and exertions of religious, who love perfection, should especially be directed to the support of obedience, in all its rigour.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"The devil, seeing that there is no road which conducts so quickly to the summit of perfection as that of obedience, throws in the way many disgusts and difficulties, under colour of good."

"The more we see that any action springs not from the motive of holy obedience, the more evident is it that it is a temptation of the enemy; for, when God sends an inspiration, the very first effect of it is to infuse a spirit of docility."—*St. Teresa.*

"If ever thou perceivest within thyself any movements, thoughts, or judgments, contrary to holy obedience, even though they should appear to thee good and holy, by no means admit them, but reject them immediately as thou wouldst suggestions against chastity and against faith."—*St. John Climacey.*

St. Jerome, writing to a religious concerning his conduct in religion, recommends this rule very particularly to him. "Do not judge the orders of your superiors, or examine the reason why they lay such commands upon you; it is your duty to obey and execute their orders, as Moses declares, 'hear Israel, and be silent.'" St. Basil proposes to religious the example of an apprentice learning his trade from his master, as a pattern of their obedience. He has his eyes continually upon his master; he obeys him in everything without contradicting, without interposing his judgment, or without ever inquiring the reason of this or that command; and, by so doing, in a little time he becomes a master himself. Pythagoras's scholars had so much respect for him, and his bare authority was so convincing a reason to them, that all controversy was silenced by the simple argument, "He said it." How much deference, then, ought religious to have for their superiors, who are far above Pythagoras, and hold the place of Christ?

Ought they not, when there is question of obedience, to think they have a sufficient reason to submit their judgments, and believe whatever is commanded them, to be most convenient for them?

The venerable John Berchmans being engaged in making his preparation to defend a thesis in philosophy before the schools, and, on that account, obliged to study, was once asked by a superior to walk out with him. He immediately complied, but felt a certain interior repugnance, of which, however, he gave no sign, but endeavoured to repress it by diverting his mind to other thoughts. As soon as he returned home, he set to work to reflect on that internal movement that he had felt in his soul, and for some days he directed to this end his examination of conscience, making thereon the most mature reflections; after which he went to lay the matter before his superior, telling him with joy that God had, at length, given him the victory over himself, and that he no longer felt any repugnance.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi being one night greatly tempted to disobedience, went towards evening into the choir, bound her own eyes, and then caused a lay sister to tie her, with her hands behind her, by a cord, to some lattices at the side of our Lady's altar. When the nuns came in to say the office, they were amazed to find her in that situation, and the prioress asked who had so bound her; the saint replied, that she had done this because obedience was irksome to her, and she wished that her body should suffer and be bound by cords, since she was unwilling to be held by the sweet bonds of obedience. She then besought the prioress to order all the nuns who

passed her, as they entered the choir, to say to her, "Now, sister Magdalene, act in your own way." All obeyed, but, in doing so, many felt a great compunction of heart, which was expressed in their manner. When all the nuns had taken the obedience, sister Mary Magdalene, still bound and blindfolded, asked pardon of all, with words of profound humility; after which the mother prioress unbound and released her, which was no sooner done than Mary Magdalene, kneeling down and fixing her eyes on an image of the Blessed Virgin, before whose altar she was, was rapt in ecstasy; and, on coming to herself, she declared, under obedience, that her act of humiliation had greatly pleased God and confounded the devil.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"Whoever follows this rule, peace on them and mercy." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Whoever wishes to live happily and to attain perfection, must live conformably to reason, to rule, and to obedience, and not to his natural likes and dislikes; such a one must esteem all the rules, must honour them all, must cherish them all, at least in the superior part of the will; for, if one rule be despised now, another will be so to-morrow, and on the third day it will be no better. When once the bonds of duty are broken, everything will be out of order, and exhibit a scene of confusion."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

No man was ever more punctual in the observance of his rule than the glorious St. Vincent of Paul,

(a) Gal. vi. 16.

so much so, that he felt a scruple to transgress the most trifling regulations of the congregation to which he belonged; thus he made it a point never to come in or go out of the cells without kneeling down; and though, towards the close of his life, from an infirmity in his legs, he found great difficulty in this practice, he would never omit it. In like manner he was always the first present at all the exercises of the community, especially at the meditation. St. Jane Frances de Chantal was so zealous for the observance of her rule, and so regardless of her natural inclinations, if they tended to dissuade her from it, that it was felt by every nun in the community, that her exact observance, especially at an advanced age, was the most powerful stimulus to each of them to imitate her in the most perfect manner they could. Once, when she was very old, appearing much fatigued on returning from the guest-room to recreation, her sisters begged her to take some repose, for that short space before the conclusion of the recreation hour, but she replied, with a tranquil smile: "What, then, will become of our rule, which orders us to do some work during the time allotted for recreation?"

St. Aloysius Gonzaga was never known to transgress the smallest rule of the society; so exact was he in this respect, that he would not receive a half-sheet of paper, or a little engraving, from one of his brethren, without first obtaining the superior's leave, as the rule prescribed.

The glorious father St. Bonaventure used to urge himself to the perfect fulfilment of his rule by the following consideration: "When I embraced the religious state, my desire was to live, not as most men do, according to my own inclina-

tions, but according to the institute of my order, with a full and punctual observance of the rule. That was the reason why, on entering the noviciate, the book of the rules was put into my hands; I was desired to study that, not the lives of men of the world. When I made my profession I accepted the rule, and took it for the guide of my conduct through life. Under these circumstances, it is my duty to observe the whole of it with the utmost exactitude, even though I saw no one else do so."

St. Francis of Sales bestows the highest praise upon a general of the Carthusians, with whom he was acquainted, for his great punctuality in the observance of his rule in the most trifling circumstances, in which the saint tells us he was so exact as to equal the fidelity of the most fervent novice.

"Oh! what a scandal," says St. Liguori, "to see certain religious, so well instructed during their noviciate in the observance of the rule, and after their profession, disregard regular discipline as if their solemn consecration to Jesus Christ exempted them from all the obligations of the religious state." A learned author says: "It is better to be a finger united to the body, than to be an eye separated from it." An eye torn from the body is but rottenness; and an action, which wears the appearance of virtue, but which is not conformable to rule, will never please God; and instead of promoting, it will impede the perfection of a religious: for, as St. Augustine says, acts of devotion opposed to rule are but so many slips out of the way, and so many stumbling-blocks to the soul.

Cassian relates, that to a certain monk, who

had abandoned the dignity of senator to enter religion, but afterwards did not observe his rule, St. Basil said, in a tone of commiseration: "You have lost the rank of senator, and have not become a monk. Unhappy man, what have you done? You have forfeited the honourable station of senator, and have not attained the sanctity of a religious." Tertullian says: "If you deem the liberty of the world to be true liberty, you have returned to servitude, and have lost the liberty of Christ." Some religious excuse their negligence by saying, that the rules which they violate are of no importance; but they are grievously mistaken, because no rule of religion can be deemed unimportant or undeserving attention. All the rules of religion should be respected, because they are all ordained by Almighty God, and approved by the church, as means to obtain the perfection to which every religious, consecrated to God, should continually aspire; and because the neglect of even trifling rules injures regular discipline, and disturbs the whole community. It is certain that the spirit of fervour flourishes in the community where attention is paid to the smallest rules; but where they are neglected, piety is either lost or beginning to decay. "Many," says St. Bonaventure, "desire to die for Christ, and are at the same time unwilling to bear light crosses for His sake." Many pant after the crown of martyrdom, and will violate their rule rather than submit to a trifling inconvenience. "If," says the saint, "you received a command hard to be observed, and in its fulfilment attended with serious disadvantages, there might, perhaps, be some apology for its violation; but, for the infraction of rules of

easy observance, there cannot be a shadow of excuse. The more easy a rule is to be observed, the more imperfect the religious is who transgresses it, because the greater is his attachment to self-will. God grant that the disregard of small rules may not lead the religious to the violation of his vows, and eternal perdition." "He that breaketh a hedge," says the Holy Ghost, "a serpent shall bite him." Whoever breaks down the fence of the rule stands in great danger of being one day bitten by the infernal serpent. When you see a religious fall into grievous faults, do not imagine that the devil, by the first attack, succeeded in effecting his ruin. No; he first induced him to neglect his rule, and to despise small things, and then drew him into grievous transgressions.

THIRTIETH DAY.

"It is better to cherish the humble desire of living according to the rule of the community, and to be diligent in its observance, than to entertain exalted desires of performing imaginary wonders, for such imaginations only tend to swell our hearts with pride, and to lead us to undervalue our brethren, from an impression that we are better than they."—*St. Pacomius.*

"The predestination of a religious may be said to be inseparably connected with a love of his rule, and a punctual performance of those duties, which he is bound to fulfil in conformity to the vocation which God has given him."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THIS saint was most anxious to infuse into the hearts of all religious a great esteem and affection for their rules. Speaking in particular of the

nuns of the Visitation, he says thus: "If they should sometimes experience any disgust or aversion for the constitutions or rules of the congregation, they must labour to act as they would amidst other temptations, correcting the aversion which they feel, by reason, and by a good and powerful resolution of the superior part of the soul; and thus wait till God sends some consolation to cheer them on the way, till He shows them, as He did Jacob, when wearied and exhausted with fatigue, that the rules and the method of life which they have embraced are the true ladder to ascend to God, like angels, by charity, and to descend into themselves by humility. But if, without any aversion, they should, from weakness, chance to violate the rule, they must immediately humble themselves before our Lord, ask His pardon, renew their resolution of observing the same rule, and take particular care not to admit dejection and disquietude into their heart, but with fresh confidence in God, strive to conform to His holy will. We may be assured, that in proportion to the increasing glow of divine love in the souls of the daughters of the Visitation, will they be more exact and careful in the observance of their constitutions, though they are not obligatory, under pain of mortal or venial sin; for, if they were enforced under pain of death, with what scrupulous exactness would they be attended to! Now love is as strong as death, consequently, the attractions of love are as effectual in producing their acts, as the threats of death. Zeal, says the sacred Canticle, is as strong as hell; souls, therefore, possessed of zeal, will do as much, and more, by its power, than they would perform from an apprehension of

hell; so that the daughters of the congregation, through the sweet violence of love, will, by the help of God, observe their rules with as much exactness as if the observance were enforced under pain of eternal damnation. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi esteemed even the smallest rules as ordinances of the Holy Ghost, and desired that each sister should observe them as such, saying, that each should keep them as if they related only to herself individually. She also used to say, that religious should be ready to shed their blood and lay down their lives rather than suffer a relaxation of the rules to enter into the community; and to secure to her monastery the perpetual observance of the rule in all its rigour, she made many promise expressly that they would observe it themselves, and firmly oppose the slightest relaxation of religious discipline in others. She also said, that such as had light and knowledge in the perfection of the religious state, should at their death leave the observance as a bequest to the survivors, that so it might be always maintained.

The venerable Father Da Ponte, when master of novices, on placing in the hands of new-comers the rules of the society, would say to them: "This is the book containing the contract between yourselves and God; study it attentively, and observe it faithfully."

It is related of the venerable John Berchmans, that he would have exposed his life to any danger rather than transgress the least rule, or fail in submission to any order of his superiors; for he considered that both emanated from the same authority, and he did not think that a religious could flatter himself with the idea of being

obedient, unless he showed equal deference to every duty bearing the stamp of obedience. Everything in the house of the Lord was of importance to Berchmans, who looked upon the least observances as honourable bands, which bound him to the service of the Great Master, under whom, slavery is far sweeter than the most unrestricted liberty elsewhere. Under these impressions, the minute details of regularity, which are so troublesome to the imperfect, were delightful to him; and he found greater satisfaction in his state of absolute dependence, than others do in following their own wills. Hence he never quitted the apartment assigned to the young Jesuits without first asking permission, always answered in Latin, as the rule prescribed; when at the country-house (where usually more liberty is allowed and taken), he was careful to observe the same strict rules of modesty, and the same regularity and exactness in his spiritual exercises as when in the college; performing them on those recreation-days with as much recollection as if he were in retreat.

During his last visit to the country-house, recreating himself with his companions in a filbert-walk, where the fruit had been already gathered, one of them perceiving a nut remaining on the tree, was on the point of gathering it, when Berchmans reminded him of the rule which forbids them to take fruit off the trees; his young companion jocularly remarking that the rule did not refer to a tree which had been stripped of its fruit, nor to a solitary nut, Berchmans no longer insisted upon the point, but he was careful not to allow himself the liberty of such interpretations. Another of his self-imposed laws was, to

avoid all dispensations: "I will detest every shadow of dispensation in matters of regularity," remarked this holy young man, "which I consider highly pernicious to religious discipline." He equally disliked general permissions, which he thought were usually asked, only to be freed from the importunate yoke of constant dependence; at all events, he thought there was less risk and more merit in having recourse to superiors on particular occasions, with an humble dependence on their good pleasure. These holy maxims were received by his dear companions as so many oracles, and practised with so much the more exactitude, as being traced in so lively and pleasing a manner in the conduct of Berchmans. Love of regularity flourished amongst these fervent youths, and whilst the servant of God was, as it were, the soul of it (animating all the others by his fervour), he little thought that our divine Lord was making use of him to enkindle this holy ardour, the effects of which he so much admired in his brethren. When this angelic youth came to die, he asked for the book of the rules; and clasping it with the tenderest devotion to his bosom, exclaimed: "With this in my hand I die happy and content." Yes, blessed saint, thou hadst good reason to die happily, for, in fulfilling the rules of thy order, thou didst fulfil the will of God; thou didst live up to that vocation which our good God gave thee, and so hadst solid ground for hoping that thou wast indeed a partaker of thy Redeemer's merits; that thou wast a living branch of the true vine, in which he that abideth shall bring forth much fruit, and be blessed for ever.

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